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, 4-24-2016



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **4-24-2016**. This week we begin with a reading from the book of Acts. The full title for the book is The Acts of the Apostles, relating the beginnings of the church that Christ established. Today's reading involves a portion of one of the Apostle Paul's missionary journeys. By contrast, the second reading is from the next-to-the-last chapter of the Bible, Revelation 21, which gives us exciting information about the new heaven and earth that God will bring into existence. The final reading, from John's Gospel, relates important words of Jesus on the night before His death, words that are intended to give us a means by which we can be known as His disciples.

Introduction to the First Reading:

Missions has always been at the heart of the ministry of the church. Just prior to 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, to baptize believers, and to 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 exactly that, and they found a mixed reception wherever they went, first reaching out to the Jews.

In the previous chapter Paul and Barnabas had come to the city of Lystra in their journey. They healed a lame man, and the crowd thought they must be gods. But some trouble makers from out of

town came and incited the people against the missionary team. As a result Paul was stoned and left for dead. He was raised up, however, and the next day moved on to the city of Derbe. Our reading begins with the report that their preaching in that city had "made many disciples."

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 give them guidance. 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 to their home church a full report of all that "God had done with them." They recognized, as all of God's servants must, that anything of eternal value that is accomplished through their ministry is ultimately the work of the Holy Spirit. It's what God does through his disciples that 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 on the basis of 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.

First Reading:

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 in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed. 24 They passed through Pisidia and came into Pamphylia. 25 When they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia. 26 From there they sailed to Antioch, from which they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had accomplished. 27 When they had arrived and gathered the church together, they began to report all things that God had done with them and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. 28 And they spent a long time with the disciples.

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 clearly 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.

The use of 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 sees 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 basically 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, so 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." And 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."*

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

What someone says just before he dies is most 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 yet today, Jesus made three significant statements.

First, He said that the Son of Man (His most frequent reference to Himself) and God the Father are glorified in Him. Isaiah wrote of this feature of Christ, and, no doubt, 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 makes it clear 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, and He preached, revealing to them their doom as a result of His sufficient sacrifice on the cross.

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 had 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 significant, as well. He says that His followers will not be known by their doctrinal knowledge, astute learning, or their following of religious ceremonies and rites. Rather, they will be recognized as His disciples when they practice His kind of unselfish love to their brethren. Such a lifestyle will draw others to the One who can give that kind of love to His people.

Gospel Reading:

John 13:31-35 NAS95 31 Therefore when he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him; 32 if God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and will glorify Him immediately. 33 Little children, I am with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, now I also say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' 34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

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 are several times which your heat was darkened?

2. List two ways in which you demonstrate that you love your fellow believers as Christ loves you, seeking to encourage and build them up in their faith?

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/042416.cfm

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Fifth Sunday of Easter

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_04-24-2016-Jesse.pdfDownload

Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 1-31-2016



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **1-31-2016**. This week we open with two passages from the prophecy of Jeremiah, who served during the time of Judah's spiritual downfall, preparing her for captivity and removal from the land. The second reading is from the familiar but remarkable chapter on love in Paul's first letter to the Corinthian Church. The final reading is from Luke's Gospel and relates the story of Jesus' encounter in a Jewish synagogue where His teaching so enraged the people that they tried to kill Him.

Introduction to the First Reading:

Because of his great sorrow over the sin of the people and impending judgment to come upon them, Jeremiah is sometimes referred to as the "weeping prophet." He was not just a melancholy neurotic, however; his was a soul of deep spirituality and great sensibility. One writer describes Jeremiah as "the most Christ-like character in the Old Testament." The prophet saw the beginning of the nation's Babylonian captivity and the destruction of Jerusalem. In spite of his preaching, he had no converts. He was rejected by his own people, hated, beaten, imprisoned, called a traitor, and forced to flee. Nonetheless, he was faithful to deliver God's message to the people, knowing it would fall on deaf ears.

First Reading:

Jeremiah 1:4-5 NAS95 4 Now the word of the LORD came to me saying, 5 "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, And before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations."

Jeremiah 1:17-19 NAS95 17 "Now, gird up your loins and arise, and speak to them all which I command you. Do not be dismayed before them, or I will dismay you before them. 18 "Now behold, I have made you today as a fortified city and as a pillar of iron and as walls of bronze against the whole land, to the kings of Judah, to its princes, to its priests and to the people of the land. 19 "They will fight against you, but they will not overcome you, for I am with you to deliver you," declares the LORD.

How reassuring it must have been for Jeremiah to have God speak to him directly and assure him that he was created by God and known by Him before his birth. God had chosen, "consecrated" (that is, set him apart), and "appointed" him to be his prophet to Judah, the remaining southern portion of the former kingdom of Israel.

Jeremiah began his ministry during the reign of Josiah (1:2) and lived through the reformation that Josiah brought about after the discovery of the Book of the Law in the Temple (see 2 Kings 22-23). To see the nation's departure from the faith and their refusal to repent was no doubt the cause for the prophet's great sorrow. His commission from the Lord must have been a great challenge from the very beginning. Although God told him he would make him like a "fortified city" and "a pillar of iron" with "walls of bronze," He also warned him that the people "will fight against you." It would be difficult for anyone to accept such a challenge with enthusiasm and hopeful prospects. The reader might be reminded of Isaiah who, also, was told that his message would be heard but not understood; the people would see but not perceive; their hearts would be "calloused," their "ears dull," and their eyes "closed" (Isaiah 6:9-10). But God did not leave Jeremiah without hope at all. He assured him that the people would not overcome him and, best of all, He said, "I am with you to deliver you."

Success for Jeremiah was not to see Judah protected from captivity or delivered from the enemy. Nor was it to have the nation respond to his message with repentance, a change of heart and mind, and a return to God in faith and obedience. Success was to be faithful in preaching the message God gave

him, to persist in spite of opposition, and to trust God for the outcome. Thus, Jeremiah is a worthy model for us to emulate.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

Paul's ministry in Corinth is recorded in Acts 18 toward the end of his second missionary journey. Corinth was a Roman colony, an influential city in its province. In spite of difficulties and opposition in Corinth, Paul remained there "many days," perhaps 18 months. In his first letter to the Corinthians, a few years after his initial visit, the apostle deals with a number of problems, disagreements, and even divisions in the church body. His purpose is to correct the errors and encourage the people to spiritual growth and unity. Sanctification might well be considered the theme, that is, the encouragement to follow Jesus in obedience and life transformation that would set them apart as disciples of Christ.

Today's reading is in the middle of a very detailed discussion of spiritual gifts, which begins in 12:1 and continues in chapters 14 & 15.Perhaps Paul understood that the subject in hand was so controversial and divisive that he needed to introduce a topic of essential importance if there was to be harmony among the believers. Chapter 13 is known far-and-wide as the great chapter on love, and it must be clearly understood if it is to become the standard by which Christ-followers are to be known. (See John 13:34-45).

Second Reading:

1 Corinthians 12:31 – 13:13 NAS95 31 But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way. 1 If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. 3 And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing. 4 Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, 5 does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, 6 does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; 7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 8 Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part; 10 but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away. 11 When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. 12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known. 13 But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.

Paul makes it clear in chapter 12 that spiritual gifts are supernaturally given to the church for the benefit of the body, not for individual pleasure. As he writes in v. 31, believers "should earnestly desire the **greater** gifts, and he proceeds to show a "more excellent way," the way of love. To read

chapter 13 is to understand something about the essential element for unity in the body and fruitful ministry. "Love conquers all," as they say.

Verses 1-3 highlight the preeminence of love. No matter how effective we might be in getting our message out, no matter how gifted we may be, no matter how great our faith in God is—without love, our efforts will be fruitless, and our work will be for nothing. We should keep in mind that there are several words for love in the language that Paul used. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Paul chose to use the word agapé, which is a word of action more than emotion. It means acting toward another person in the best interest of that person. It is unselfish, other-directed, and self-sacrificing. Paul is saying that love is preferred over eloquence, prophecy, mysteries, knowledge, faith—all of which he himself demonstrated in abundance.

The words that describe love in verses 4-7 are indicative of the qualities that the Christian should possess and demonstrate. Many are included in the list of the Spirit's "fruit," in Galatians 5:22-23. We would do well to ask ourselves, "How many of these godly traits do I show to others in my daily life?" Patience, kindness, generosity, humility, goodness, graciousness, confidence, assurance, endurance: are they easily seen in our lives? One of the most convicting truths about love is that it doesn't keep track of wrongs. How difficult it is for many of us to lovingly overlook the wrongs done against us.

The concluding verses of the chapter (8-13) emphasize the permanence of love. Everything else may pass away from our lives and experience, but love will endure. Paul uses a very helpful metaphor to explain how life should reflect our growing maturity. We used to "speak," "think," and "reason like a child," but when we grew up, we "did away with childish things." He goes on to teach us that we have not yet arrived, we see things now only "dimly," but one day it will be "face to face," and then we'll understand fully all that God has planned for us. The concluding sentence (v. 13) is well known, but perhaps not fully appreciated. Faith and hope are essential, of course, and they will continue to be important, but the greatest attribute of the Christian life is the continual demonstration of love. Jesus said that we are to "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Matthew 22:37-38).

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

Luke's Gospel is the result of the careful study of Dr. Luke, a companion of the apostle Paul, who wanted to present an accurate review of the life and ministry of Jesus. Luke focuses on Jesus as Savior, a divine man. He stresses the humanity of Jesus Christ and his perfection as a human. He makes it clear that the gospel is for both Jews and Gentles. He seeks to confirm what Christians already believed was true and trustworthy. Today's reading details the appearance of Jesus in a synagogue in Nazareth, his hometown. Apparently he attended there regularly. On this occasion he stood up to read from the sacred scrolls. In this passage we read about the conflict between Jesus and the crowd who earlier "were speaking well of him," but changed in their attitude after His reading.

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Gospel Reading:

Luke 4:21-30 NAS95 21 And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." 22 And all were speaking well of Him, and wondering at the gracious words which were falling from His lips; and they were saying, "Is this not Joseph's son?" 23 And He said to them, "No doubt you will quote this proverb to Me, 'Physician, heal yourself! Whatever we heard was done at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well.'" 24 And He said, "Truly I say to you, no prophet is welcome in his hometown. 25 "But I say to you in truth, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the sky was shut up for three years and six months, when a great famine came over all the land; 26 and yet Elijah was sent to none of them, but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. 27 "And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian." 28 And all the people in the synagogue were filled with rage as they heard these things; 29 and they got up and drove Him out of the city, and led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city had been built, in order to throw Him down the cliff. 30 But passing through their midst, He went His way.

Jesus read a portion of chapter 61 of Isaiah's prophecy, and indicated that it had "been fulfilled in your hearing." At that point everyone responded well to His comment and wondered what it all meant. They identified Jesus with Joseph, Mary's husband, and the presumed father of Jesus. Jesus knows that the people had heard of the wonderful things he had done at Capernaum and knew that the people wondered why he didn't do such things here in Nazareth. Jesus answers with what has become a common expression today, "A prophet is not without honor except in his own country."

Jesus then relates two stories that were, no doubt, familiar to his audience. The prophet Elijah had helped a poor widow who was suffering in the midst of a famine of three-and-a-half years. His successor, Elisha, brought healing to the Syrian general, Naaman, a leper. The point of these illustrations from history is that even the greatest of God's prophets did not serve everyone; not every leper was healed; not every widow was cared for. Likewise, although Jesus may have performed miracles in other places, He did not do so everywhere and for everyone. The crowd seemed incensed that He did not do these works in His hometown.

Why was the crowd so upset to the degree that they "drove Him out of the city"? They were so enraged that they had intended to throw Him off a cliff. Only by God's miraculous deliverance was Jesus able to escape "passing through their midst." There are several probable major reasons. First, Jesus related two Old Testament stories of the prophets ministering to Gentiles during a time of Israel's unbelief and disobedience. Remember, that one of Luke's purposes in writing his Gospel was to reveal God's great plan to include Gentiles in His redemptive plan. That was an irritant to the Jews.

Second, Jesus seemed to equate Himself with the revered Old Testament prophets. Furthermore, He was making an unambiguous claim that He was the Messiah who fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy that He had read. It was because of the total impact of these claims that we read, "They were filled with rage" and sought to kill Him.

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Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. Ask yourself, "Could I, like Jeremiah, remain faithful to teaching God's Word in the midst of strong opposition, endangering my life?" In what ways are you facing opposition to your Christian beliefs and way of life? How has God empowered you to take a stand for Him?

2. I worked for many years with several people who I found out many years later were Christians. I was surprised that they had never approached me to discuss their beliefs, and their bashfulness made me ponder their motives in not doing so. Yet even if they did not speak up I knew that there was something different about them. In what ways is your life characterized by love so anyone who knows you would recognize that you belong to Jesus?

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/013116.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, 12-27-2015

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **12-27-2015**. This week we open with 1 Samuel 1 where God gives a barren woman a son, whom she dedicates back to the Lord and His service. Then we move to Colossians 3 where we are told to live out the virtues of Christ in response to all He has done in and for us. Finally, we conclude with the Gospel of St. Luke 2 where Jesus begins to reveal His deity and many around him are amazed.

Introduction to the First Reading:

Gender reveal parties have become a popular way for expecting couples to reveal the gender of their baby to family and friends. It is a fun excuse for a party but the truth is, in our society, most people are thrilled and thankful no matter what the gender is.

If the technology had been available, a gender reveal party would have made more sense in Old Testament times. It was important among the Hebrew people to have children. Barrenness was seen as a curse and children as a blessing from the Lord. It was an even greater blessing to have a boy because the family name, inheritance, and headship were passed down through the son.

Elkanah, a man who lived during the time of the Old Testament judges, had two wives—Peninnah and Hannah. There was a rivalry between the two, and Peninnah, who had several sons and daughters, would regularly provoke Hannah because she was barren. This caused Hannah great sorrow.

Yearly, Elkanah would go up to the temple in Shiloh to worship the Lord there. On one of these trips, Hannah poured out her sorrow in the form of a prayer and vow to God. She promised that if God would give her a son, she would in turn give him back to the Lord to serve Him all the days of his life. God heard her prayer and gave her a son whom she named Samuel.

In the First Reading, we see Hannah fulfilling her vow to God. How hard it must have been for her to relinquish her only son to the Lord. Once the child was weaned, she took him to Eli, the priest at Shiloh, and presented him for service to God. What a great demonstration of faith this was.

Sometime later, but while Samuel was still a young boy, God called him to be a prophet in Israel and used him in a powerful way to reveal God's direction and will to God's people. Samuel faithfully spoke the word of the Lord concerning Israel all the days of his life. At God's direction, he anointed David to rule as king over Israel. Eventually another king would come from the house and line of David who would save His people from their sins and reign in righteousness. This king is Jesus.

First Reading:

1 Samuel 1:20-28 NAS95 20 It came about in due time, after Hannah had conceived, that she gave birth to a son; and she named him Samuel, saying, "Because I have asked him of the LORD." 21 Then the man Elkanah went up with all his household to offer to the LORD the yearly sacrifice and pay his vow. 22 But Hannah did not go up, for she said to her husband, "I will not go up until the child is weaned; then I will bring him, that he may appear before the LORD and stay there forever." 23 Elkanah her husband said to her, "Do what seems best to you. Remain until you have weaned him; only may the LORD confirm His word." So the woman remained and nursed her son until she weaned him. 24 Now when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, with a three-year-old bull and one ephah of flour and a jug of wine, and brought him to the house of the LORD in Shiloh, although the child was young. 25 Then they slaughtered the bull, and brought the boy to Eli. 26 She said, "Oh, my lord! As your soul lives, my lord, I am the woman who stood here beside you, praying to the LORD. 27 "For this boy I prayed, and the LORD has given me my petition which I asked of Him. 28 "So I have also dedicated him to the LORD; as long as he lives he is dedicated to the LORD." And he worshiped the LORD there.

Like Samuel, our children are a gift from God. We don't have to turn them over to full-time service in the church in order to dedicate them to Him. Teach them to serve God whole-heartedly no matter what profession they choose, knowing that God can do much with a man or woman whose heart is fully devoted to Him.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

In many of the Apostle Paul's letters, he presents a tragic picture of us in our sinful, fallen state and contrasts us with Christ in his holiness and perfection. In addition, he recounts what God has done for us in His grace, when we deserved only wrath. Once we understand the depth of our sin and the riches of His grace toward us, only then does he ask us to live a life that properly honors God and reflects His glory.

In the book of Colossians, St. Paul tells us that we were enemies of God, alienated from Him and

living in spiritual and moral darkness (Col.1:13,21). Jesus on the other hand, is the perfect image of the invisible God and supreme over all creation (1: 15-18). By His death He rescued us from the dominion of darkness and reconciled us to God, presenting us free from blemish and accusation (1:13, 22). Because of this, St. Paul says we are to live a life displaying His virtues and being thankful.

Second Reading:

Colossians 3:12-21 NAS95 12 So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. 14 Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. 15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. 17 Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father. 18 Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. 19 Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them. 20 Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord. 21 Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart.

To display these virtues, we must cooperate with God's work of transformation. If you read all of Ch. 3, you will notice how this passage is interspersed with action verbs that indicate there is something God wants us to do. Col. 3: 2 tells us to *set* our mind on things above—that is, to think about what we possess in the spiritual realm—salvation from our sin, peace with God, and eternal life, to name a few. Verse 5 tells us to *consider* ourselves dead to evil desires. Verse 9 tells us we are to *put aside* the old self and *put on* the new self. That means to actively put aside old habits and patterns of living associated with our old, sinful self and actively live out the virtues of our new life in Christ by the power of God's Spirit.

In the Second Reading, we are told to *put on* the virtues of compassion, forgiveness, peace, and love. We are to *let* the Word of Christ dwell in our hearts, living its wisdom and teaching its precepts to others. Wives are to *submit* to husbands, husbands are to *love t*heir wives, and children are to *obey* parents. God is transforming us into Christ's likeness and calling us to intentionally live out those virtues for the benefit of others and the glory of God.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The first 20 verses of the second chapter of the Gospel of St. Luke are some of the most well known of the whole New Testament. This is the story of Jesus' birth in a humble stable and the angels' glorious announcement to the shepherds that a Savior has been born.

This Savior was God the Son who took on human flesh and was born as a baby—fully God and fully man. And just like other human babies, Jesus grew from an infant to a boy to a man, increasing in

physical stature but also in wisdom and favor with God and men (Luke 2:40,52).

While much of his growth was typical, Jesus also developed in ways that astounded those around Him. This Gospel Reading recounts an occasion when Jesus, as a twelve-year-old boy, amazed the seasoned teachers in the temple with the depth of His understanding of the things of God.

Jesus had come to Jerusalem in a caravan with his parents to celebrate the Feast of the Passover. A day into the return trip, Mary and Joseph discovered their son was not with them. They quickly returned to Jerusalem, and after an anxious three-day search, found Jesus in the temple, interacting with the Jewish teachers.

Mothers everywhere can identify with Mary's response which was likely a mixture of relief and consternation: *"Why have you treated us this way? Behold, your father and I have been anxiously looking for you."* Jesus' response must have sounded impudent to those who didn't fully understand who He was. He asked, *"Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know I had to be in My Father's house?*

No, Mary didn't know. It seems neither she nor Joseph fully understood the implications of the statement their son had made to them. They didn't understand that Jesus was under the authority of another Father, a Heavenly One, and Jesus would soon follow that Father's will all the way to the cross. All would be revealed in the fullness of time. Until then, Jesus continued to live in subjection to His earthly parents, and Mary treasured all these things in her heart.

Gospel Reading:

Luke 2:41-52 NAS95 41 Now His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. 42 And when He became twelve, they went up there according to the custom of the Feast; 43 and as they were returning, after spending the full number of days, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. But His parents were unaware of it, 44 but supposed Him to be in the caravan, and went a day's journey; and they began looking for Him among their relatives and acquaintances. 45 When they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem looking for Him. 46 Then, after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. 47 And all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers. 48 When they saw Him, they were astonished; and His mother said to Him, "Son, why have You treated us this way? Behold, Your father and I have been anxiously looking for You." 49 And He said to them, "Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father's house?" 50 But they did not understand the statement which He had made to them. 51 And He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and He continued in subjection to them; and His mother treasured all these things in her heart. 52 And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

Mary tried to make sense out of the events as they unfolded. We, on the other hand, have the whole written record of Jesus in the Bible. We know the rest of His story: He entered into ministry, performed miracles, claimed to be Son of God, and proclaimed that He was (and is) the way, the

truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but by Him (Gospel of St John 14:6). He purchased our salvation through His death and resurrection, and someday He is coming again to rule and reign in righteousness. This Christmas season we can celebrate our Savior's birth and share the rest of this glorious story with all who come to celebrate with us.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. What can you do this week to actively put aside old habits and patterns of living associated with your old, sinful self and actively live out the virtues of your new life in Christ by the power of God's Spirit?

2. On Christmas a Savior was born. What can you do to help others around you know Jesus as their Savior?

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/122715.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, 12-6-2015

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



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **12-6-2015**. This week's reading begins with a passage from the Apocrypha. We begin our exposition with the second reading which is from Paul's letter to the church in Philippi then conclude with the Gospel reading from the third chapter of Luke. The Philippians passage allows us to see into the heart of the Apostle Paul and the mutual affection he shared with the believers in Philippi. The Gospel account introduces us to the ministry of John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus. The reading includes a quotation from the prophet Isaiah, which foretells something about both John's ministry and the work of the one whom he introduced. [By Jesse Deloe]

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 beginning of Paul's ministry in Philippi is described in the Book of Acts, chapter 16, beginning at verse 11. Philippi was a leading city in the Roman colony of Macedonia, and became the location of the first Christian church in Europe. While there, Paul and his companions were mistreated because of their preaching and were imprisoned. Paul and Silas were miraculously released during an earthquake and had the opportunity to bring about the conversion of the jailer and his family as a result. The missionary team departed

the city and continued what is regarded as Paul's second missionary journey.

Paul wrote the letter to his converts in Philippi to express his gratitude for their financial support in his time of need. The letter was delivered by Epaphroditus, Paul's companion. This is a very personal letter that encourages the church to live with joy and in unity.

Second Reading:
Philippians 1:4-11 NAS95 4 always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, 5 in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now. 6 For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus. 7 For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me. 8 For God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. 9 And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, 10 so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; 11 having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

Typical of his letters, Paul tells his readers about his prayers for them. He is joyful because of their involvement with him in the sharing of the gospel from the very beginning of their relationship with him. They can have great joy, he writes, because of his confidence that what God started in them at their conversion will be completed. They will be preserved and kept until the "day of Christ Jesus," no doubt a reference to the second coming of Christ to establish His eternal kingdom, about which Paul writes in many of His epistles. That confidence should encourage today's believers, also. If a person has placed his trust in the work of Christ to provide salvation, he can be assured that he will be saved until the very end.

Verses 7 and 8 assure the Philippians of Paul's great affection for them. He tells them, "I have you in my heart." That is true, in part, because he considers that they have been a significant part of his life through their gifts and prayers and during his imprisonment and the difficult times he has had in proclaiming the gospel. His feeling for them is so great that he describes it in strong terms of longing and affection.

The specific elements of Paul's prayer reveal his concern that these converts grow in their spiritual lives. He prays that their love may increase continually. It is not just a feeling, however; it is a love that is based on "knowledge" and "discernment." In the 20 centuries since Paul wrote those words, current society seems to have lost the real meaning of love. Today, it seems to be either a fleeting sentiment based on passing emotions or a purely

physical attraction. But true love requires knowing the loved one well and the ability to discern qualities worthy of affection.

Such discernment enables one to choose what is truly best ("excellent" is Paul's term). He writes in a later chapter that Christians should "let [their] mind dwell on" things that are honorable, right, pure, lovely, and of good report "if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise" (4:8). Why? So that until the end of life on earth they will be "sincere and blameless." It is only by filling our minds with those kinds of things that we can live a holy and righteous life. It must have been difficult for believers to live such godly lives in their godless society. What a challenge that is for 21st century Christians with the constant influences of evil through the ever-present media of our times.

Is it possible to live such holy lives? To be sure, it is difficult. But the final portion of today's reading reveals the secret. It is possible only because the believer, as Paul writes, has "been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ." Apart from the indwelling Christ, it would be impossible to be blameless, but while we are still in our present bodies and are incapable of perfection, we do have the power within to increase in holiness and righteous behavior. And, Paul reminds us that all such spiritual progress will be "to the glory and praise of God."

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

As we begin the next reading, we should remember that Luke's Gospel is the result of careful study so that he can present an accurate review of the life and ministry of Jesus. He introduces his story by assuring the readers of "having investigated everything carefully from the beginning." Luke's perspective, not in contrast with the other Gospels but as complementary to them, focuses on Jesus as Savior, a divine man. He stresses the humanity of Jesus Christ and his perfection as a human.

Although Luke seems to be writing mainly to Gentile Christians, he makes it clear that the gospel is for both Jews and Gentles. He seeks to add to the knowledge of those early Christians confirming that what they already believed was true and trustworthy. Today's reading follows the first two lengthy chapters which relate the stories of Christ's birth and surrounding events. As we approach the Christmas holiday, it might be good to re-read those familiar passages before looking at today's text more carefully.

Gospel Reading:
Luke 3:1-6 NAS95 1 Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip was tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene, 2 in

the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John, the son of Zacharias, in the wilderness. 3 And he came into all the district around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins; 4 as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, "THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, 'MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT. 5 'EVERY RAVINE WILL BE FILLED, AND EVERY MOUNTAIN AND HILL WILL BE BROUGHT LOW; THE CROOKED WILL BECOME STRAIGHT, AND THE ROUGH ROADS SMOOTH; 6 AND ALL FLESH WILL SEE THE SALVATION OF GOD.'"

Verse 1 of today's reading gives very specific details of the political and geographical environment into which John the Baptist was to come. Verse 2 introduces the religious leaders of the immediate area. Furthermore, it states that "the word of God came to John" as a simple fact without indicating how or under what circumstances except that it came "in the wilderness" where John seemed to live (Matthew 3:1-5). Zacharias is noted as John's father. The unique story of the announcement and birth of John is recorded earlier in Luke's Gospel (1:5-25).

John the Baptist's message was very clear. Luke says he came "preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." We should be reminded that repentance means a lot more than just being sorry for your sin. The New Testament word actually means "changing your mind," and it's not just a mental attitude. Genuine repentance involves a change in behavior that results from the renewed mind. John must have been a powerful preacher (enabled by the Holy Spirit, of course), because many responded to his message, repented, and were baptized. Elsewhere, we read that John's message of repentance included his preaching that "the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2). This is the same message Jesus preached (Matthew 4:17).

All of this was predicted centuries before by the prophet Isaiah (ch. 40) as repeated by Luke in today's reading. The first prophesied statement is obviously fulfilled in John. Clearly, he was a voice "crying in the wilderness." In an apparent allusion to the preparations that were usually made for a dignitary's travel, John is to make the way clear for the promised Messiah by his teaching. The next several clauses are thought to be poetic ways of saying that the way for Messiah will be advanced, and obstacles will be removed. These clauses may also be metaphors suggesting that the proud and arrogant will be humbled.

Verse 6 quite clearly has reference to the ministry of Messiah, not John the Baptist. In the preceding chapter (2:30-32) Luke had quoted other Scriptures indicating that salvation ultimately would be for both Jews and Gentiles. This is a message that Luke particularly emphasized since he was writing primarily to a Gentile audience, and the Jewish population often mistakenly thought that salvation was for Israel alone.

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Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. What did you learn today about having confidence that God has begun a good work in you and will complete it? That is possible only if you have put your personal trust in Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection to atone for your sin.

2. In what ways are you filling your mind with the "excellent" things of life that will honor God and build your Christian character?

3. During the past year, what are some specific circumstances when you acknowledged your sin before God, and change your mind and behavior so that you can live a life of holiness?

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/120615.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 5-17-2015

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **5-17-2015**. This week Marla shares the study of the readings beginning with Acts 1 where Peter explains how God's plan unfolds just as the Scriptures said. Next we move to 1 John 4, where the apostle John tells us that those who abide in God, love as He loved. Finally we conclude with John 17:11-19 where St. John records Jesus' prayer for His disciples just before He sends them out to minister in His name.

Read Online:http://www.christiansforchrist.org/articles/weekly-study-notes-for-the-sunday-mass/5-17-2015

Introduction to the First Reading:

If you were a fan of the 80s show *The A-Team,* you will remember the iconic phrase spoken at the end of nearly every episode, "I love it when a plan comes together." In a make-believe story the plan always comes together—the writers make it so. Real-life human plans are not so reliable and can be thwarted. God's plan, however, always comes together exactly as God says. No one is strong enough to thwart His plan.

Before Jesus was taken up into heaven, He told His apostles to wait in Jerusalem until they received the baptism of the Holy Spirit which would give them power to be Christ's witnesses to the world. (The baptism of the Holy Spirit is the Holy Spirit indwelling believers, enabling them to understand the truth and empowering them to do the work God has for them.) It was during this period of waiting that Peter spoke to the apostles and over 100 believers gathered with them. Here Peter reminds them that God's plan was being fulfilled just as the Scriptures said.

First Reading

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Acts 1:15-26 NAS95 15 At this time Peter stood up in the midst of the brethren (a gathering of about one hundred and twenty persons was there together), and said, 16 "Brethren, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit foretold by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus. 17 For he was counted among us and received his share in this ministry." 18 (Now this man acquired a field with the price of his wickedness, and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his intestines gushed out. 19 And it became known to all who were living in Jerusalem; so that in their own language that field was called Hakeldama, that is, Field of Blood.) 20 "For it is written in the book of Psalms, 'LET HIS HOMESTEAD BE MADE DESOLATE, AND LET NO ONE DWELL IN IT'; and, 'LET ANOTHER MAN TAKE HIS OFFICE.' 21 Therefore it is necessary that of the men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us– 22 beginning with the baptism of John until the day that He was taken up from us–one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection." 23 So they put forward two men, Joseph called Barsabbas (who was also called Justus), and Matthias. 24 And they prayed and said, "You, Lord, who know the hearts of all men, show which one of these two You have chosen 25 to occupy this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place." 26 And they drew lots for them, and the lot fell to Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles.

Judas, one of the original twelve apostles, walked intimately with Jesus during the three years of His ministry. He heard Jesus' powerful words, witnessed His healing touch, and participated in His miraculous acts. Yet by a decision of his own evil heart, Judas betrayed his Lord and turned Him over to the Roman authorities to be crucified. It did not catch Jesus by surprise but was, with all its tragic detail, just as the Scriptures foretold. Judas' betrayal, as sinful as it was, did not thwart God's ultimate plan for man's salvation but rather was a step in its fulfillment.

When Judas, consumed by guilt, took his own life, a new apostle had to be chosen from the men who had been with Jesus from the beginning. Only two men qualified, Joseph and Matthias. The apostles prayed for God guidance and cast lots to discover God's choice. In that day, lots were cast by writing each eligible person's name on a piece of stone or wood, putting the pieces in an urn, and drawing out a name. * God's plan was fulfilled when Matthias' name was chosen.

We can be confident that God has a plan for us, too, and He will make it come together for our ultimate good and His glory. I love it when His plan comes together!

Introduction to the Second Reading:

In the six verses of our Second Reading, the word *love* and its derivatives are used eight times. God is the author and source of true love. If God did not exist, love would not exist for God is love. He powerfully demonstrated it by sending Jesus to fulfill the greatest act of love known to mankind—a substitutionary death on a cross. Romans 5:8 says, *"God demonstrated his own love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."* Jesus didn't die for a good cause or a good man. He died for you and me, not after we cleaned up our life, but while we were still lost in our sin. His death for us was the Innocent dying for the guilty, the Perfect dying for the broken, the Holy dying for the sinful. Can there be any greater demonstration of love?

Is it any wonder then, that love is a hallmark of one who abides in God? *Abide* is a word that means "to stay in a given place, continue, dwell, remain" (Strong's Exhaustive Concordance, # 3306). St. John tells us we come to abide in God by confessing Jesus is the Son of God and believing the love God has for us as demonstrated through Christ's death. And when we abide in Him we will love as He loved. It is important to understand, however, that we don't love *in order* to abide. We love *because* we abide in Him. When we receive God's love and extend it to others, we prove that we abide in the One who is love.

Second Reading

1 John 4:11-16 NAS95 11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us. 13 By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. 14 We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. 15 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. 16 We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

When I left my son at college for the first time, I knew I would not see him again for six months. On the 12-hour ride, his father and I reminded him of the important precepts we had taught him about God and living the Christian life. We were hoping he would continue to walk the path of faith and not stray from the truth of the Scriptures. After settling him into his dorm and expressing our love through hugs and tears, we prayed and released him into the Father's care.

For three years, Jesus had lived and ministered with the ones he chose to be his disciples. He loved them, revealed himself to them, and taught them what was to come. Though they heard him and were witnesses of His miraculous works, they didn't fully understand that He would die for sin, rise from the dead, and return to God the Father. It was now time for Jesus to fulfill His Father's will and to set in motion all the prophesies spoken about Him in the Old Testament. And it was time to

say goodbye. The disciples would have to face a world of opposition and persecution without him, and they were understandably bewildered and sad.

In Ch. 13 of the Gospel of St. John, Jesus begins an extended, heart-felt goodbye. He would shortly send them out to serve others so He gave them a powerful demonstration of servanthood by washing the disciples' feet, an act typically done by the servants of the household. Jesus said, *"… I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you* (John 13: 15). In Ch. 14, He comforts them by explaining that He is building a home for them in heaven and someday will come again to take them there. In the meantime, they are to get their nourishment and power by abiding (remaining) in Him as branches get their life by remaining in the vine (Ch. 15). In Ch. 16, He promises the Holy Spirit will empower them (and every believer) to carry on His ministry and to lead them into all truth. Now in Ch. 17, on the night He was betrayed, Jesus prays for the disciples as he sends them out to minister in His name.

Gospel Reading

John 17:11-19 NAS95 11 "I am no longer in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep them in Your name, the name which You have given Me, that they may be one even as We are. 12 "While I was with them, I was keeping them in Your name which You have given Me; and I guarded them and not one of them perished but the son of perdition, so that the Scripture would be fulfilled. 13 "But now I come to You; and these things I speak in the world so that they may have My joy made full in themselves. 14 "I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. 15 "I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. 16 "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. 17 "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. 18 "As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. 19 "For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth.

In the Gospel Reading, Jesus makes three requests of the Father:

1). Jesus prays that the Father would keep the disciples in His name.

What is Jesus asking for when He says to the Father, *keep them in your name*? His *name* refers to all that God is and all that Jesus revealed Him to be. Jesus and the Father are one. As Christians, we are united to them and carry the same name. To live in God's name is to live in a way that reflects his character. While Jesus was with His disciples, He kept them in God's name and none of them were lost except Judas. Did Jesus fail to keep Judas in God's name? D.A. Carson in his commentary on The Gospel of John explains, "The defection of Judas is foreseen in Scripture [Ps. 41:10], and therefore no evidence of failure on Jesus' part." Jesus had kept His disciples and now that He was leaving, He asks the Father to keep His disciples faithful to His name.

2). Jesus prays that the Father would keep them from the evil one.

The forces of evil are real and oppose all God wants to accomplish in the world. Satan himself prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8). God could have taken His disciples out of the world, but left them here as ministers of the good news of Jesus Christ. It is also why we are here. Jesus doesn't ask for them to be removed from the world but that they might be protected from the evil one while they do His work.

3). Jesus prays that the Father would sanctify them by truth.

Sanctify means *to make holy* and has the idea of being set apart for holy use or a holy purpose. (Strong's Exhaustive Concordance, # 37, 40). Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, is holy in his being but was also set apart for a holy purpose—to be the sacrifice for sin. As God the Son, He is separate from the evil world system, but He willingly entered into the world to save it through His death on a cross. As the disciples came to believe in Jesus, they also were sanctified for a holy work—to take the truth of the gospel to a lost world. Everyone who believed the disciples message would also be sanctified in truth for the words they bring are God's words. And we also are sanctified when we believe the Bible, God's written word of truth.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. If we abide in God we will love others as God loved us. What can you do this week to demonstrate God's love to those around you?

2. Like the disciples, you have been sanctified (set apart) by God for a holy purpose—to take the truth of the gospel to a lost world. What can you do this week to begin fulfilling God's purpose for your life?

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/051715.cfm

First Reading ACTS 1:15-17, 20A, 20C-26

Second Reading 1 JN 4:11-16

Gospel Reading JN 17:11B-19

Source(s):

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

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Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

*casting lots, http://biblehub.com/commentaries/acts/1-26.htm , accessed 5/9/15

Keywords: baptism of the Holy Spirit, betrayal, love, abide, sanctify, truth

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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).

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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

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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).

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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?