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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 6-19-2016



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass Study Notes for **6-19-2016**. One of the main take away points from this week's readings is the role of Jesus as Messiah Who saves peoples from their sins. This is in contrast to the teachers of that age who taught that salvation came through obedience of the works of the Jewish Law. We will also discuss how taking your cross is an invitation to freedom and not a burden.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Prophet Zechariah. Zechariah, like Jeremiah and Ezekiel, was a priest. He wrote to the exiles in Babylon to comfort them by giving them God's Word that He would fulfil all of the promises He made to His covenant people the Jews.

First Reading:

Note: The reading omitted 12 and 13 which are include below.

Zechariah 12:10 – 13:1 NAS95 10 "I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn. 11 In that day there will be great mourning in Jerusalem, like the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the plain of Megiddo. 12 The land will mourn,

every family by itself; the family of the house of David by itself and their wives by themselves; the family of the house of Nathan by itself and their wives by themselves; 13 the family of the house of Levi by itself and their wives by themselves; the family of the Shimeites by itself and their wives by themselves; 14 all the families that remain, every family by itself and their wives by themselves. 1 In that day a fountain will be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for impurity."

Today's reading looks far forward to a future day in which God will awaken a remnant of the Jews who return to Him in faith. Saint Paul records this clearly in Romans 11 where he explains how God allowed the hardening of the Jews so that the Gentiles could find salvation. "For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery–so that you will not be wise in your own estimation–that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in" (Romans 11:25). Once the very last Gentile that God has ordained has come to faith in Jesus the next chapter in God's master plan will begin, which is the awakening of the Jewish remnant alive at that time. "And so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, "THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB" (Romans 11:26).

In this passage, Zechariah is describing events related to the Day of the Lord, also known as Jesus' second coming. In the affairs at the end of time, Zechariah states that God will pour out the Spirit of grace and of supplication on the Jewish people. What does this mean? God's grace means that the Jewish people are given favor that they did not earn and that they do not deserve. A Spirit of supplication means that people will be given a burden to ask for things in prayer that are on God's heart, and He will answer their cries. Zechariah also describes great mourning as they look on the One that they have pierced. The mourning is likened to Hadadrimmon, where Josiah was slain by the Egyptians. The immense sorrow that was felt throughout all of Israel was a focal point in Jewish history because Josiah was one of the very few godly kings and did much to point Judah back to their covenant relationship with God. Therefore, when Zechariah says that their mourning over the killing of the Messiah will be like this great tragedy, he is clarifying that the Jews will understand and regret their role in crucifying Jesus in his first coming. This grieving will culminate in personal awareness of sin and impurity, so that God's people will see sin the same way He sees it.

Grieving over sin is an important part of growing to be like Christ. As a Christian, we are instructed by this passage to also be aware of the effects of sin in our own lives. Just as the Jews will be shocked and grieved over their blindness, we can ask God to shine His light into our lives and give us spiritual sight. This spiritual sight may cause grief as we start to see things from God's perspective, but it will ultimately cause cleansing and healing in our relationship with Him and bring wisdom for daily living.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

Paul explains in the second reading, that those who believe in Jesus are the offspring of Abraham and, therefore, heir to the promise given to him in Genesis. The line of thought before the reading

delineates that the promise of God was made before the giving of the Mosaic law, and is predicated on faith not works, ethnicity, social standing, gender, etc. This section is a culmination of Paul's main point in the entire book of Galatians, where he explains that justification is by faith, not by works.

Second Reading:

Galatians 3:26-29 NAS95 26 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 27 For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise.

This passage sums up an important message that the believers in Galatia were struggling to understand. While they had received Christ into their lives by faith, there were some who were convincing them that they still needed to follow the Mosaic law. Paul definitively defends the truth that salvation comes by faith, not by works. He describes the law as a guardian or schoolmaster that was in place to point people to recognize their need for a Savior. So now the question is not "Are you Jewish?" meaning, "are you a son of Abraham?"; but rather, the question is "Are you in Christ?" No matter our national origin, socio-economic status, or gender, we can all be sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. The implication, then, is that we are all on the same team, working together to reflect the reality of Christ's life in our lives. We are heirs to God's promise to Abraham by virtue of being born again in Christ Jesus (John 3:3). Part of what it means to grow in Christ is to grow in our understanding of all the rights and privileges of being a son or daughter of God.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The context of the Gospel reading from Luke is just after his recording of the miracle of the feeding for the five thousand (Luke 9:10-17). The parallel Gospel accounts reveal that after this great miracle, Jesus retreated in the same boat that they had taken to the "desolate place" from the village of Bethsaida (Mark 6:30, 32, 45). The Gospel writers Matthew, Mark and John record an important event that occurred during the water journey. After Jesus had dismissed the crowds, He directed the disciples to take the boat to the other side of the lake, back to Bethsaida while He went up on the mountain to pray (Matthew 14:22). As the disciples attempted to work their way upwind (Matthew 14:24), they saw Jesus walking on the water (v. 25). At this point Peter joined Jesus walking on the sea, at least for a time until Jesus rescued him and helped him back into the boat (v. 29). Next the group went "up on the mountain to pray" (Mark 6:46) after passing by the "region of Magadan" (Matthew 15:39) where Jesus got into a heated discussion with the Pharisees who came to test Him (Matthew 16:1012). It is after this whirlwind of events that we pick up with today's reading.

Gospel Reading:

Luke 9:18-24 NAS95 18 And it happened that while He was praying alone, the disciples were with Him, and He questioned them, saying, "Who do the people say that I am?" 19 They answered and

said, "John the Baptist, and others say Elijah; but others, that one of the prophets of old has risen again." 20 And He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" And Peter answered and said, "The Christ of God." 21 But He warned them and instructed them not to tell this to anyone, 22 saying, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed and be raised up on the third day." 23 And He was saying to them all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. 24 For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it."

Jesus' inquiry of the disciples: "Who do the people say that I am" (v. 18) evidently took place in Caesarea Philippi as we see in Matthew 16:13 and Mark 8:27. It is interesting that Jesus chose this mysterious place because it was a location that was used for pagan worship. Jesus sought refuge in this unique place away from the crowds ("alone," v. 18) to seek fellowship in prayer with His heavenly Father, which was His practice. The disciples had just experienced the miracles of the feeding of the five thousand and Jesus' walking on the water. However, we know from the parallel account they continually failed to understand (Matthew 16:9). Therefore, Jesus inquired of them regarding His true identity (v. 18). The disciples said that the people saw Jesus as another John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the Old Testament prophets that rose from the dead (v. 19). Peter, being inspired by God Himself, declared Jesus to be the Messiah (another word for Christ), which means the anointed one of God who would come to save His people (Matthew 16:17).

Why would Jesus not want his disciples to share this with others? Was Jesus trying to hide His identity or obscure His mission in the world? No. We understand this warning in light of the misconceptions that the Jews had for the Messiah. Instead of a civil king that would vanquish the Roman rule, Jesus was a spiritual king seeking to vanquish the enemy of our souls, one heart at a time. He predicted how he would do this, which required his suffering, rejection by the Jewish leaders, crucifixion and resurrection. The call to discipleship to this type of king would require a level of commitment that some would have trouble accepting. Jesus shared an important value of life in His kingdom. Instead of being ruled by self and sin, Jesus saves us to bring us freedom to follow a new way of life that is ruled by His value system. In denying self, we are not building up a treasury of merit; instead, we are being freed up for the abundant life that Jesus came to bring us (John 10:10). In looking at it another way, God does us a favor by freeing us from the oppressive nature of self so that we can live the life He has designed for us to live in Christ. We lose what we thought was our life, but gain what God defines as true life. This requires great faith. No wonder those who give their life over to Christ and walk by faith are called the children of Abraham.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. Just as the Jewish people in Jesus' day had misunderstandings about what they needed to be saved from, what are some misunderstandings that present day people think they need to be saved from? Which misguided notions of Jesus' Messiahship resonate most deeply with you? How does your growing knowledge of the Word of God and relationship with the true Messiah help you to counteract these misguided notions?

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2. How does understanding that denying myself and carrying my cross is not about working or merit, but about freedom? How does Jesus' promise to bring abundant life factor into your view of denying the false notions of what this life is about and give you encouragement to take up your cross in a way that brings life that is truly life?

3. When you consider the unity of the family of God through faith in Christ explained in the Galatians' reading, what ways can you contribute to the value that people have for one another and, especially for those who are different than they are.

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/061916.cfm

Tenth Sunday in Ordinary Time Lectionary: 90

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_06-19-2016.pdfDownload

Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 12-20-2015

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **12-20-2015**. This week we open with the first reading from the Prophet Micah where we learn about a prediction God gave concerning the Messiah. Then we learn about Jesus' high priestly ministry in the second reading from the Book of Hebrews. We close this week's study with the Gospel reading from Luke in which Mary visits Elizabeth.

Introduction to the First Reading:

As a Christian, it's important to be patient and wait upon God, even when we see great injustices going on around us. Impatience was one of the issues that got into the way of the Jews properly interpreting the passages concerning the coming Messiah. One may think that if the First Century Jews had a good grasp on the Scriptures so many of them wouldn't have missed the First Coming of Jesus. The Jews had endured centuries of persecution from the various world powers including the Assyrians, Babylonians, Greeks, and finally the Romans. From all appearances the Prophet Micah made it very clear what would happen, even if this forerunner didn't explain the exact timing of the events.

Today's reading opens with a summary of the former sieges possibly under the direction of either King Sennacherib (of the Syrian Empire) or Nebuchadnezzar (of Babylon), then provides an astounding prophecy about the coming ruler Jesus. Micah wrote during the reign of Kings Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah (Micah 1:1), some eight centuries before the birth of Jesus.

First Reading:

Micah 5:1-4 NAS95 1 "Now muster yourselves in troops, daughter of troops; They have laid siege against us; With a rod they will smite the judge of Israel on the cheek. 2 "But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Too little to be among the clans of Judah, From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler

in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, From the days of eternity." 3 Therefore He will give them up until the time When she who is in labor has borne a child. Then the remainder of His brethren Will return to the sons of Israel. 4 And He will arise and shepherd His flock In the strength of the LORD, In the majesty of the name of the LORD His God. And they will remain, Because at that time He will be great To the ends of the earth.

Micah said that their enemies would so disparage them that even their own king would be humiliated, or "With a rod they will smite the judge of Israel on the cheek" (v. 1c). Throughout their history Israel has frequently been the subject of attacks and invasions, and in this case Micah was likely referring either to an attack by the Assyrians or the Babylonians. While this prophecy came true in Micah's day they also pointed to the Messiah. Jesus was struck in the face in the time leading up to His crucifixion (John 18:22, Matthew 26:67). From there the prophet moved on to reveal more about the coming Messiah we now know as Jesus. He said, "But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Too little to be among the clans of Judah, From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, From the days of eternity" (v. 2). Micah named the exact town in which the Messiah would be born. Though there were two towns named Bethlehem in Israel, he differentiated between the one in the north and the one near Jerusalem in which the new King would be born. One would assume that a powerful leader would come from the capital city, Jerusalem. However, Micah's prophecy revealed that this would not be case, instead the ruler would come from the tiny insignificant town of Bethlehem. (We sing the song, "O Little Town of Bethlehem," as a reminder of God's unusual way of exalting the lowliest of cities for His purposes). From this insignificant city God would bring forth a ruler who usher in spiritual deliverance from the ultimate enemy Satan. Micah brought forth the idea that the Messiah was from eternity (v. 2). This corresponds to what the Prophet Daniel said about the Messiah being the "Ancient of Days" (Daniel 7:22). He is not a created being, rather He existed in eternity past as part of the Godhead (John 1:1-2). It is difficult to understand what the prophet meant when he said, "He will give them up until the time when she who is in labor has borne a child" (v. 3). It is safe to say that the Israelites were subject to a 400-year period of prophetic silence where they might have felt abandoned by God and wondered if He would ever bring forth the promised Messiah. The prophet goes on to foretell the in-grafting of the Gentiles into the family of God by saying, "Then the remainder of His brethren Will return to the sons of Israel" (v. 3, see Romans 11:17). Like the other prophets, Micah also telescoped near and far term events today when he saw the kingdom of Jesus. During Jesus' First Advent, He came as a shepherd leader where He declared Himself to be the Good Shepherd (verse 4, John 10:11). His true leadership is yet to be realized after He returns at the end of the age "Because at that time He will be great To the ends of the earth" (v. 4).

It's amazing when you compare Micah's prophecy to the life of Jesus and recognize the precision of the fulfillment by Jesus. As we move towards Christmas may we be reminded of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem and His coming rulership over all the earth when He comes again so that our lives reflect this reality.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

Jesus fulfilled other prophecies besides what we just read in Micah. Our New Testament reading in Hebrews points out another important way that Jesus completed the requirements of the Old Testament sacrificial system. Through His perfect sacrifice, Jesus ushered in a new era of relating to God the Father. This passage helps us to see why it is necessary for us to place our faith in Jesus Who perfectly executed the will of the Father on our behalf.

Second Reading:

Hebrews 10:5-10 NAS95 5 Therefore, when He comes into the world, He says, "SACRIFICE AND OFFERING YOU HAVE NOT DESIRED, BUT A BODY YOU HAVE PREPARED FOR ME; 6 IN WHOLE BURNT OFFERINGS AND sacrifices FOR SIN YOU HAVE TAKEN NO PLEASURE. 7 "THEN I SAID, 'BEHOLD, I HAVE COME (IN THE SCROLL OF THE BOOK IT IS WRITTEN OF ME) TO DO YOUR WILL, O GOD.'" 8 After saying above, "SACRIFICES AND OFFERINGS AND WHOLE BURNT OFFERINGS AND sacrifices FOR SIN YOU HAVE NOT DESIRED, NOR HAVE YOU TAKEN PLEASURE in them" (which are offered according to the Law), 9 then He said, "BEHOLD, I HAVE COME TO DO YOUR WILL." He takes away the first in order to establish the second. 10 By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

The author of Hebrews quoted from several Old Testament passages to show how Jesus fulfilled the requirements of the Law and brought an end to the need for the sacrificial system. The first Old Testament passage is from Psalm 40:6 that explains how God was fed up with their dead religion which involved ritualistic sacrifice. The Psalmist explains how the One that will come to fulfil these prophecies will perfectly obey the will of God, "I delight to do Your will, O my God; Your Law is within my heart" (Psalm 40:8). Because Jesus perfectly fulfilled the will of God, we can be counted righteous based upon His merit (2 Corinthians 5:21). The reading closes with an important point about how Jesus took away the first covenant of the Law and brought in the second one of grace. The author said, "By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (v. 10). We are sanctified or made holy through a one-time sacrifice that can never be repeated.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading this week tells the story of Mary the mother of Jesus' visit to Elizabeth who was to be the mother of John the Baptist. The context of the reading is that Mary had just been visited by the Angel Gabriel and told how she would be the mother of God's Son Jesus, the Messiah. This reading is very important for Mary because she had just been told this incredible news about how God was going to bring the Messiah into the world through a supernatural, virgin birth. You can imagine that Mary's heart was both elated and confused. Her visit to Elizabeth would have been a comforting and confirming experience to establish her faith in God's unusual method of bringing the Messiah into the world.

Gospel Reading:

Luke 1:39-45 NAS95 39 Now at this time Mary arose and went in a hurry to the hill country, to a city

of Judah, 40 and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. 41 When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. 42 And she cried out with a loud voice and said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! 43 And how has it happened to me, that the mother of my Lord would come to me? 44 For behold, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped in my womb for joy. 45 And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what had been spoken to her by the Lord."

When Mary arrived at her relatives' home, Elizabeth was six months pregnant even though she was advanced in age and barren up until that point (Luke 1:36). Elizabeth's greeting would have been confirmation to Mary that God was up to something and her appearance by the Angel Gabriel was not a figment of her imagination. We see a contrast in this passage regarding the response to the Angel Gabriel's messages. Zacharias had not believed Gabriel but instead had asked for a sign (Luke 1:18). Elizabeth said under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that Mary had immediately believed, "And blessed is she who believed" (v. 45a). She was able to encourage Mary's tender heart of belief that God could do the impossible, especially in light of the fact that she herself was pregnant with her own miracle child.

Elizabeth used this opportunity through the power of the Holy Spirit, to pronounce blessing upon Mary. She said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb" (v. 42). She also blessed her for believing what God had spoken to her through Gabriel. You can imagine that these pronouncements of blessing would have been important to Mary as she endured much opposition and suspicion over her unusual pregnancy. Mary may have even questioned whether this was a blessing or a curse when she was almost divorced by Joseph and when they had to travel to Bethlehem when she was great with child. The Christmas story is full of difficulties but this passage reminds us that being in the center of God's will is to be blessed. Circumstances do not determine our favor from the Lord.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. As Christmas is very near take a moment to conduct an inventory of thankfulness. Write down five things for which you are thankful this Christmas holiday.

2. List two major challenges that came your way during the past year. How has God helped you through your challenges this year? What Scripture verses helped you during these difficult times?

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/122015.cfm

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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 7-5-2015



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **7-5-2015**. This week we learn about the commission of the prophet Ezekiel. Then we study the value of weakness in the life of Paul and by application how God uses it for our good. We close with a study of Mark's Gospel in which we see the rejection of Jesus' message by those close to him from His own home town.

The first reading is from the Prophet Ezekiel. The context is the opening of his prophecy and would have been written after he had been carried off captive to Babylon in 597 BC. Ezekiel said in 1:1 that he was 30 years old when he began his ministry, the same age as when the priests begin working in their position. Ezekiel was unique in that he held both offices, that of prophet and priest (see Ezekiel 1:3). The young man Ezekiel wrote of the visions he received from God while he "by the river Chebar among the exiles" (1:1). Today's reading is God's commissioning of Ezekiel to speak to the Nation of Israel that was in the process of being judged by Him for their sin.

First Reading

Ezekiel 2:1-5 NAS95 1 Then He said to me, "Son of man, stand on your feet that I may speak with you!" 2 As He spoke to me the Spirit entered me and set me on my feet; and I heard Him speaking to me. 3 Then He said to me, "Son of man, I am sending you to the sons of Israel, to a rebellious people who have rebelled against Me; they and their fathers have transgressed against Me to this very day. 4 I am sending you to them who are stubborn and obstinate children, and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD.' 5 As for them, whether they listen or not–for they are a rebellious house–they will know that a prophet has been among them."

Since Ezekiel was far removed from the temple his ministry duties as a priest would have been practically eliminated. However, God called Ezekiel to a new ministry as a prophet and empowered him through the sending of the Holy Spirit specially to him. The Spirit of God was the One that "set [him] on [his] feet" and only after this event did Ezekiel begin hearing God speak directly to him in contrast to the visions he recorded in the opening of the book. Now that Ezekiel was commissioned as God's prophet, the oracles began pouring out to him. First, God told him to whom he was sent: the "sons of Israel" (v. 3b). Next, as if Ezekiel didn't already know, God told him about the rebellious nature of the people. God used multiple harsh phrases to describe them including rebellious (3 times), transgressors, stubborn, obstinate, as well as implied that they would not listen (v. 5).

What can we learn from this commissioning passage from Ezekiel's life? While we may not be a prophet or a priest, we can see some principles about how God works and what our response to Him should be. First, when God calls a servant He empowers them through His Spirit. As church age believers we are guaranteed that the Holy Spirit lives within us (Ephesians 1:14) to empower us to do works of service that He has prepared in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:10). Second, we are to carry out God's commission regardless of the response of those who we are serving. We should not be complexly oblivious to receiving constructive feedback in how to improve in serving people. However, this passage is teaching that sometimes our service will go unappreciated. When that is the case God is calling us to remain faithful, regardless of the response.

I know of a missionary who worked in Germany for a dozen years without seeing even a single faith convert to the Lord. It would have been very easy to be discouraged and to evaluate his work as a failure. But in God's value system this man, like Ezekiel, was faithful even though there wasn't a lot on the outside to show for it. In Ezekiel's case, rabbinical tradition says that he was eventually killed by someone who resisted his message. Both of these examples serve to encourage us to persevere under adverse circumstance when we are trying to do God's will in our own lives.

The second reading is from Saint Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians. In this passage, Paul is explaining the importance of weakness for our spiritual growth.

Second Reading

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 NAS95 7 Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me–to keep me from exalting myself! 8 Concerning this I implored the Lord three

times that it might leave me. 9 And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. 10 Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

When is weakness ever a good thing? In our culture the answer is never, but in God's economy it serves a valuable purpose. Paul, because of his unique position as one who had direct revelation from God, could have tried to do ministry in his own strength. Dependence upon God is our life source. Unfortunately we can be deceived into thinking that we don't need God, even as a Christian. So God in His kindness and wisdom allowed the "thorn in the flesh" to come upon Paul. The "thorn in the flesh" is a messenger of Satan, which is obviously something bad, something we wouldn't want for ourselves. Even though Paul pleaded and thought that he would be more productive without it, God reassured him that this bad thing could be used for his own good. The good that God used it for was to break Paul's of the dangerous and self-destructive nature of self-reliance and instead develop a spirit of dependence upon God which was his lifeline.

Like Paul, we are often deluded into believing that real life is found in exerting our independence and power over our circumstances. Self-reliance though, does not lead us to eternal life. Instead, abiding in Christ and dependence upon God is where real life is found (John 15:1-5). These character qualities of abiding and dependence upon God do not come naturally to us. God, in His infinite wisdom, knows how to keep us close to Himself and He will use even bad circumstances, i.e. a thorn in the flesh, to carry out His purpose in our life.

In the next passage, we will see a fatal response to Jesus' display of supernatural power in his home town of Nazareth.

Gospel Reading

Mark 6:1-6 NAS95 1 Jesus went out from there and came into His hometown; and His disciples followed Him. 2 When the Sabbath came, He began to teach in the synagogue; and the many listeners were astonished, saying, "Where did this man get these things, and what is this wisdom given to Him, and such miracles as these performed by His hands? 3 Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? Are not His sisters here with us?" And they took offense at Him. 4 Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and among his own relatives and in his own household." 5 And He could do no miracle there except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them. 6 And He wondered at their unbelief. And He was going around the villages teaching.

In this vignette we see people discrediting Jesus' ministry because of their own short sightedness and resentment. In other passages, we see people being humbled by Jesus' display of power. Here the people of Jesus' hometown list the names of specific family members in an attempt to invalidate His miraculous signs. This would seemingly let them off the hook for being accountable to recognize

the Messiah among them. The proper response to the Messiah would be to follow Him but they choose to disdain Him. As we saw in the first reading the people of Israel are a rebellious lot, obstinate, and refuse to listen even when miraculous signs are manifested in their presence. As a result of their great lack of faith Jesus' miraculous signs were withheld because God shows up when we exercise faith in Him (Hebrews 11:6).

This passage teaches us that there are two responses to Jesus' rightful claim as Messiah. One response is to believe and place our trust in Jesus even when it feels kind of awkward or it costs us dearly. The second response is to push away the overwhelming evidence by discrediting the messengers of the Gospel and His message. These people could see the signs because they were coming from Jesus who was to them just a regular human being. Instead of shifting their lives to be open to Jesus' claim of divinity and messiahship they rejected Him. We can learn from their fatal response.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. I have been struggling with some health issues that are chronic in nature and undiagnosed. The daily frustration and concern over this causes me to live my life in a way much closer to God's kingdom than the world. Without this constant struggle I would not be as conscious of my need for the Lord and his daily sustenance.
List one weakness with which you are suffering from which you have asked God to deliver you. Talk to Him in prayer about how He might be using this to develop your dependence upon Him.

2. During the Fourth of July holiday I frequently travel back to my hometown to celebrate. I encounter people who are aware of the spiritual transformation that happened in my life when I surrendered my life to Jesus. Sometimes they respond to me in a similar way as the people in Jesus' hometown who resented the fact that He was holy.
How can the passages from this week's study encourage you to persist in your own holiness and personal service of the Lord even when others disparage or scoff at your spiritual development?

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/070515.cfm

First Reading EZ 2:2-5

Second Reading 2 COR 12:7-10

Gospel Reading MK 6:1-6

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Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB