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, 6-26-2016



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **6-26-2016**. A key verse this week that links all three readings together is in the second reading from Galatians, "For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please" (Galatians 5:17). We desire to accomplish great things for God, but our flesh works against us. When we cooperate with our carnal, fleshly desires we may not achieve the full potential that God has for us. We will see how these forces rage among the people in all three of today's readings.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The context of the first reading from First Kings is just before the appointment of Nimshi as the King of the Northern tribes of Israel and the replacement of Elijah the prophet by Elisha. Elijah, the great prophet of God, had just killed the prophets of Baal after the great contest at Mount Carmel. When King Ahab's evil wife Jezebel found out about the slaying of the prophets she set out to kill Elijah (1 Kings 19:2). This caused Elijah to flee and he came to believe that he was the only believer left in the entire kingdom. Elijah said, "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars and killed Your prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away" (1 Kings 19:10). God replied as we see in today's reading and corrected his false assumption.

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First Reading:

1 Kings 19:16-21 NAS95 16 and Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint king over Israel; and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place. 17 "It shall come about, the one who escapes from the sword of Hazael, Jehu shall put to death, and the one who escapes from the sword of Jehu, Elisha shall put to death. 18 "Yet I will leave 7,000 in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal and every mouth that has not kissed him." 19 So he departed from there and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, while he was plowing with twelve pairs of oxen before him, and he with the twelfth. And Elijah passed over to him and threw his mantle on him. 20 He left the oxen and ran after Elijah and said, "Please let me kiss my father and my mother, then I will follow you." And he said to him, "Go back again, for what have I done to you?" 21 So he returned from following him, and took the pair of oxen and sacrificed them and boiled their flesh with the implements of the oxen, and gave it to the people and they ate. Then he arose and followed Elijah and ministered to him.

God gave Elijah specific guidance to appoint Jehu as the king of Israel and to anoint Elisha as his own successor (v. 16). God told Elijah that he wasn't the only believer left and that He had 7,000 true believers left in the kingdom (v. 18). Next, Elijah went and found Elisha out working and placed his prophet mantle (clothing) on him. When Elisha wavered about immediately accepting this responsibility Elijah told him in effect that to forsake this appointment would be an affront to God (v. 20). So Elisha accepted his new position and made a traditional sacrifice to confirm the "covenant" made between him and God to fulfill the prophecy given to Elijah.

The reading points out just how bad conditions had become in Israel such that Elijah believed that he was the only believer left alive. However, it is interesting that while 7,000 believers remained, even that was a very low number in view of the large size of the nation. Evidently most of the people had succumbed to the evil pagan worship practices memorialized in the Bible by King Jeroboam the son of Nabat who is recorded as a standard of evil. We see that standard mentioned earlier in First Kings. "For he walked in all the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat and in his sins which he made Israel sin, provoking the LORD God of Israel with their idols" (1 Kings 16:26).

The big idea in the reading is regarding the supreme sovereignty of God. Even when the great prophet in the entire world felt that all hope was lost, God continued making plans for the future of the kingdom and reminding him of His omniscient and long-term view. In our age we can look to this passage to be reminded that God has our best interests in mind, is establishing future plans for us as well as all believers, and even when we feel totally spiritually alone our sovereign Father is superintending the circumstances for His glory and our best interests.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The context of the reading from Galatians is Saint Paul's teaching on the freedom believers possess in Christ as contrasted to the bondage that the false teachers were imposing upon the people by instructing them that they must obey the Mosaic Law. Paul explains further in the reading the battle

between a believer's spirit and their flesh.

Second Reading:

Galatians 5:1 NAS95 1 It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.

Galatians 5:13-18 NAS95 13 For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. 14 For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." 15 But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another. 16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. 17 For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.

Paul reminded the believers in Galatia of their overarching purpose by quoting from the Mosaic Law in Leviticus 19:18: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." He cautioned them not to use their freedom in Christ to take advantage of their "neighbors." The Jews by that time had come to understand their neighbor in a very narrow sense such that it only included their fellow countrymen. Jesus had earlier corrected this false teaching in Luke Chapter 10. There Jesus explained the meaning of "neighbor" by telling them the parable of the Good Samaritan. Jesus explained to His disciples that, of all the people who passed by the man who had fallen at the hands of robbers, the only one who acted as a true neighbor as intended by God in Leviticus 19:18 was "The one who showed mercy toward him" (Luke 10:37). This is extremely important in this context because the Epistle to the Galatians was directed at the false teachers who taught that in order for people to be saved they must obey the constraints of the Mosaic Law making them, in effect, proselyte Jews. Paul and Jesus taught something quite different, that the neighborhood of God included anyone who was in need. Our true family includes those who have come to the Father through faith in the Son (John 3:16). Therefore, instead of trying to follow all of the contours of the Mosaic law, one would fulfill the spirit of the law by being a loving person. The only way a person can be truly loving (self-sacrificing and honoring of others above self) is if their heart is surrendered to God and His Spirit is now in control of the individual. The difference between someone who tries really hard to be a good person and one who is a Christian, is the power of the Holy Spirit alive in one's heart. The Holy Spirit is God's evidence that His life is inside a believer. While a believer is a work in progress and will not be perfect in this life, a fundamental change has taken place when we surrender ourselves to God through Christ. A new relationship has begun and we are under the influence of God's Spirit, which transforms us. We begin to walk in step with the values of God's Spirit. And since God is love, it makes sense that He teaches us how to be more loving. This is not a matter of self-effort, but a growth in the life of God who makes His home in our hearts. Paul was clear that "*if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law*" (v. 18).

One wonders if at times Paul felt marginalized like Elijah as we discussed in the first reading where

the prophet had fled from evil Jezebel's murderous plot. Paul, surrounded by false teachers that plotted to drag believers into the strictures of Jewish legalism, expressed God's prophetic word regarding the freedom that was to be found only through faith in Jesus Christ.

In our lives we must ask ourselves in what ways are we attempting to work out our own salvation through obedience to some form of religious law. It's hard not to notice those in our neighborhoods who never seem to leave their houses on Sunday morning to go to church. Do we hold to a false belief system that we are a pretty good person because we have faithfully attended Mass on Sundays and holy days that we are somehow going to be set apart from others who have not so zealously obeyed the commandments of the church? When we place our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins we have moved from darkness into light (1 Peter 2:9). The difference between a person that has truly trusted in Jesus versus the one that is relying upon their own works for salvation is subtle but very real as Jesus explained to Nicodemus. In John Chapter 3 Nicodemus, a legalistic Jew from the group known as the Pharisees, was a Rabbi who came to Jesus at night for fear of the Jews (John 3:2). Jesus explained to Nicodemus how he could only enter the kingdom of heaven through faith in Him. In one of the most important verses in the entire Bible Jesus told him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). Jesus went on to explain to him that in addition to the obvious necessity of physical birth, something much less obvious was necessary. In order to become a citizen of heaven one must be born spiritually through faith in God's Son. He told Nicodemus, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him." (John 3:16-17).

If you are struggling with understanding the true motives of your heart, the Scripture says that you should call out to God in prayer. Paul said, "that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation" (Romans 10:9-10). As we move to the final reading this week, take a moment to affirm your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The context of the reading is Luke's recording of the beginning of the end of Jesus' earthly life just before he gave His life for us on the cross at Calvary. Earlier the disciples had been arguing over who among them was the greatest. Jesus then presented them with a child and told them, "Whoever receives this child in My name receives Me, and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me; for the one who is least among all of you, this is the one who is great" (Luke 9:48). He then corrected His disciples who had rebuked someone for casting out demons in the name of Jesus, saying "Do not hinder him; for he who is not against you is for you" (v. 50). This hints at some of the same tension that Paul was indicating in the second reading between the strict followers of the Law and those that followed it less closely or held to other religious traditions. Nowhere was this tension more evident than in the region of Samaria where the people were held in contempt by the Jewish legalists. The

Samaritans were considered a half breed people since they had been overtaken by the Assyrian Empire during the fall of the Northern Kingdom in 722 BC. Interestingly, Jesus turned to this despised group for help in making the preparations for the celebration of His last Passover feast. This was the Passover after which the true Lamb of God would be sacrificed for the sins of the world.

Gospel Reading:

Luke 9:51-62 NAS95 51 When the days were approaching for His ascension, He was determined to go to Jerusalem; 52 and He sent messengers on ahead of Him, and they went and entered a village of the Samaritans to make arrangements for Him. 53 But they did not receive Him, because He was traveling toward Jerusalem. 54 When His disciples James and John saw this, they said, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" 55 But He turned and rebuked them, and said, "You do not know what kind of spirit you are of; 56 for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." And they went on to another village. 57 As they were going along the road, someone said to Him, "I will follow You wherever You go." 58 And Jesus said to him, "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." 59 And He said to another, "Follow Me." But he said, "Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father." 60 But He said to him, "Allow the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God." 61 Another also said, "I will follow You, Lord; but first permit me to say good-bye to those at home." 62 But Jesus said to him, "No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

We see in the reading that the Samaritans didn't welcome Jesus' disciple's efforts in making the arrangements for the Passover feast even though Jesus had sent messengers ahead of time to them (vv. 52-53). Instead, they were forced to travel onto another village, one which was very likely outside the constraints of Samaritan beliefs. When James and John, named by Jesus the "Sons of Thunder" (Mark 3:17), were confronted with the rejection of their efforts they showed their passion and love for Jesus by asking Him whether they should command fire to come down from the sky and destroy the Samaritans (v. 54). The disciples were familiar with how Elijah had commanded fire to come down from the sky to consume the sacrifice during the contest with the prophets of Baal, but now they were asking not to burn already dead cattle but rather living people! Jesus quickly corrected their false thinking and reminded them that He didn't come to "*destroy men's lives, but to save them*" (v. 56). This is reminiscent of what we read in our discussion of the second reading from John 3:17 where Jesus said, "For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him." As the reading progressed, Jesus taught His disciples about true discipleship and answering the calling of God. A true disciple would have to be willing to not only forsake their comfortable home (v. 58) but also to forsake their family in order to follow Him (v. 59). Here we see a clear parallel with Elisha's initial response to God's call through Elijah that we read about in the first reading.

As believers in the Lord Jesus we are called to forsake the things which hold us back to true obedience of the Lord Jesus. As we saw in the first reading, when God places a calling upon our lives we are to respond in obedience. Our answer must be to forsake the things which may hold us back,

whether they be family, as we saw in the Gospel reading, or religious practices as we saw in the second. Like Elisha, even if in our humanness we hesitate for a moment while we count the cost of our obedience, we are called to respond in faith by following the directives given to us by God. As a first step of belief we are called to forsake the false understanding that we are saved from our good works and rather seeing that our deeds flow from our relationship with God. As we enter into God's invisible spiritual kingdom, the "kingdom of heaven" that Jesus explained to Nicodemus in John 3:3, we participate through God's power, as Paul said in the reading from Galatians, being led by the Spirit. At times although we too may desire to command fire down from heaven to consume our adversaries, Jesus calls us to a higher standard by recognizing these people as our "neighbors." This battle will continue for the duration of our life here on earth, "For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please" (Galatians 5:17).

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. Most Christians are not known for their love. Instead, the world characterizes us as judgmental, harsh, and angry. Who are the "neighbors" that you regularly interact with? What would it look like for you to walk in the Spirit and change this characterization with your "neighbor?"

2. Jesus illustrated true discipleship as a relationship with Him that prioritized Him above all other priorities. In what ways have you made intentional decisions to orient your life around His Kingdom principles? What has been the cost of discipleship for you? Are there any new ways that He is asking you to follow Him?

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/062616.cfm

Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Lectionary: 99

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

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Mass Study Notes for Sunday 3-1-2015



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for 3-1-2015. This week we begin with the first reading from Genesis in which we see Abraham's journey to sacrifice his son Isaac and discuss the typology of Isaac. Then we move to the second reading from Romans where we discover more about God's special relationship with His believers. We conclude with the Gospel lesson from Mark in which we see Jesus' transfiguration in which a glimpse of his divinity is revealed to this very special subset of believers including Peter, James, and John.

Before we begin this week I want to note something about the various formats in which we make these study notes available each week. For readers who have subscribed to the Mass Notes by email they receive the text of the study along with a link to both the PDF and the html version published on the web site. The version on the web site has the advantage of "mouse over" links for all of the verse references. This means that anytime an online reader positions their mouse over a verse reference the full text of that reference is made available to them. [In the cases where the text of the verse isn't provided this is a very handy feature.] Being able to see how Scripture interprets itself or correlates with other passages is a good skill to develop as you read and study God's Word. Please keep this in mind as you do your own studies.

The first reading is from the Book of Genesis. The context is the story of Abraham traveling to Mount Moriah to sacrifice his firstborn son Isaac. As you read, highlight any similarities that you find between Father Abraham's attempted sacrifice of Isaac and God the Father's giving of His Son Jesus

for a sacrifice on Calvary. *Note: All of the intermediate verses between 1 and 18 were included in order to provide the full context and meaning.*

Genesis 22:1-18 NAS95 1 Now it came about after these things, that God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." 2 He said, "Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you." 3 So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him and Isaac his son; and he split wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. 4 On the third day Abraham raised his eyes and saw the place from a distance. 5 Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go over there; and we will worship and return to you." 6 Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son, and he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together. 7 Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." And he said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" 8 Abraham said, "God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." So the two of them walked on together. 9 Then they came to the place of which God had told him; and Abraham built the altar there and arranged the wood, and bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. 10 Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. 11 But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." 12 He said, "Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me." 13 Then Abraham raised his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him a ram caught in the thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram and offered him up for a burnt offering in the place of his son. 14 Abraham called the name of that place The LORD Will Provide, as it is said to this day, "In the mount of the LORD it will be provided." 15 Then the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven, 16 and said, "By Myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son, 17 indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies. 18 In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice."

Abraham fulfilled God's commandment to journey to the mountain in order to sacrifice his son, the son of promise born to him and Sarah. Abraham likely believed that since God had already provided him a son through supernatural means in his old age He could provide him with another son once he sacrificed Isaac or He could raise Isaac from the dead . One thing that stands out is both Abraham and Isaac's faithfulness in obeying God. Abraham was obedient to his Father God, while Isaac was obedient to his father to the point of even carrying the wood for his own sacrifice and allowing himself to be bound. We wonder what was going through Isaac's mind during all of this. At the last possible moment, God provided a substitute sacrifice (v. 13). In the end, God complemented Abraham for his obedience (v. 18).

There are two main applications of the reading. First, God took note of Abraham's radical faith that

was manifested in his obedience and blessed him for it. In the same way, we as believers and the seed of Abraham we are blessed by God for our radical faith that is manifested in daring steps of obedience. As children of Abraham, we are called to obey God even when it means taking radical measures in what He has revealed in His word for us to do. A second application has to do with the typology of Isaac. Isaac is what is called a "type of Christ." Here are a few of the similarities between Abraham's attempted sacrifice of Isaac and the once and for all sacrifice of Jesus for sin on the cross (1 Peter 3:18).

- Abraham journeyed and on the third day reached the mountain (v. 4). Isaac was bound but then released on the third day because God provided a substitutionary sacrificial lamb. Jesus, God's sacrificial lamb (John 1:29), laid in the grave for three days and rose from the dead on the third day (1 Corinthians 15:4) whose sacrifice was a substitute for our sins. Both physical people were given back to their fathers on the third day.
- Both Isaac and Jesus were willing to offer their bodies as a sacrifice (vv. 7-8, Colossians 2:6-8).
- Father Abraham surrendered his son Isaac to God's will (v. 10). God surrendered His Son Jesus for His own will. The Scripture says, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16).
- Isaac carried the wood for his own sacrifice (v. 6) and Jesus carried his wood for His sacrifice (John 19:17)
- Ishmael was technically Abraham's first son, but he was a child of the flesh born to the slave Hagar, not the child of promise born to Sarah. Therefore Isaac was his father's one and only son (v. 2). Jesus was God's one and only Son (John 3:16), Whom He loves (Matthew 3:17).
- Isaac was obedient to his father to the point of death. Jesus was obedient to His Father to the point of death and beyond (Philippians 2:8).

We see this story of a Father's sacrifice echoing the ultimate story of God's sacrifice that was made through Christ's death on the cross for us.

The second reading is from Saint Paul's Letter to the Romans. The context is Paul's teaching on the very special relationship that exists between God and the believer. He said in the opening of this chapter, "Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). Next, he teaches on the difference between those living in the flesh and those living in the spirit. He said that those that live in the flesh cannot please God (v. 8), but as believers we are not in the flesh but in the spirit (v. 9). Next, there is a connection to the first reading as Paul said, "The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him" (vv. 16 – 17). Like Abraham and Isaac, we are heirs with God through our faith in Christ. As you study the text of the second reading, remember the special relationship that you have with your Father God through faith in Jesus.

Romans 8:31-34 NAS95 31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? 32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? 33 Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one

who justifies; 34 who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.

We learn a few things from this short passage. God let Abraham off the hook in sacrificing Isaac, but did not allow such a provision for Himself when it came to the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus. His Son was the "Lamb slain since before the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8). If God was willing to go to such great lengths to save us, we can be assured that He will continue to provide all we need for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). Later in his ministry Paul said that since God is our justifier, and this does not come through our own performance or good works, how could anyone say that we are guilty when we have already been forever forgiven (v. 33)? Paul noted that Jesus is the One that intercedes for us. Later Paul said, "For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5). We can have absolute confidence in the fact that since Jesus is our one and only intercessor with God the Father, nobody can bring a charge against us because we stand holy and blameless before Him. In the midst of our trials we can take hope that God is still in control and that He is at work for our good. A few verses previous to this concluding though Paul says that "God works all things together for good for those who love God and are called according to His purposes" (Romans 8:28). God is in the business of conforming us to the image of His Son and no one can stop Him (Romans 8:29).

The Gospel reading is from Saint Mark and follows the miraculous feeding of the four thousand (Mark 8:9) which was after Jesus had also fed the five thousand (Mark 6:44). The disciples didn't yet understand that these two events were miracles (Mark 6:52) whereas the people continued to follow Jesus because they liked the good food that He provided them (John 6:26). After Jesus fed the 4,000, He left with the disciples in the boat and they forgot to take along enough food and had only one loaf of bread (Mark 8:14) even though seven large baskets had been left over after feeding the crowds (Mark 8:8). At this point Jesus knew about their lack of bread and told them to "Watch out! Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod" (Mark 8:15). This confused the disciples so Jesus went on to explain to them about the two miraculous feedings. We are including this because it shows how Jesus corrected His disciples' unbelief in the events leading up to the revelation of His glory on the Mount of Transfiguration about which we will be studying in the Gospel reading.

*"17 And Jesus, aware of this, *said to them, "Why do you discuss the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet see or understand? Do you have a hardened heart? 18 "HAVING EYES, DO YOU NOT SEE? AND HAVING EARS, DO YOU NOT HEAR? And do you not remember, 19 when I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces you picked up?" They *said to Him, "Twelve." 20 "When I broke the seven for the four thousand, how many large baskets full of broken pieces did you pick up?" And they *said to Him, "Seven." 21 And He was saying to them, "Do you not yet understand?" (Mark 8:17-21) Note: The asterisks (*) denote a verb with the historical present tense, something that does not exist in the English language.*

For at least this instant, the disciples were being as hard hearted as were the people who were following Jesus for no other reasons than He provided them with food and healed their sick. Jesus,

because of His kindness and special relationship with the disciples, especially the unique group of three (Peter, James, and John), explained to them the meaning of what had happened during the feeding of the two large groups. At this point the Holy Spirit moved mightily in Peter's heart and he proclaimed through the power of the Spirit, "You are the Christ" (Mark 8:29). This leads to the opening of Chapter 9 in which we as readers of God's Holy Word are honored with being able to partake in Jesus' transfiguration that included not only Peter, James, and John but also two additional biblical characters from the Old Testament living in heaven (Mark 12:26 – 27).

Mark 9:1-10 NAS95 1 And Jesus was saying to them, "Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power." 2 Six days later, Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John, and brought them up on a high mountain by themselves. And He was transfigured before them; 3 and His garments became radiant and exceedingly white, as no launderer on earth can whiten them. 4 Elijah appeared to them along with Moses; and they were talking with Jesus. 5 Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three tabernacles, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah." 6 For he did not know what to answer; for they became terrified. 7 Then a cloud formed, overshadowing them, and a voice came out of the cloud, "This is My beloved Son, listen to Him!" 8 All at once they looked around and saw no one with them anymore, except Jesus alone. 9 As they were coming down from the mountain, He gave them orders not to relate to anyone what they had seen, until the Son of Man rose from the dead. 10 They seized upon that statement, discussing with one another what rising from the dead meant.

After the disciples had continually misunderstood the miraculous events surrounding the feeding of the two large groups of people, Jesus chose this special subset of His disciples to experience yet another miraculous event, His transfiguration before them. This event revealed an important aspect of Jesus. While He was fully man, He was also fully God. Moses and Elijah appeared with Him in this supernatural and surreal glimpse into Jesus' divinity (v. 4). Peter, a man who it seemed always wanted to solve problems, opened his mouth to suggest that since it was the Feast of Tabernacles that they should build three booths, one for each of the three men. He said this because he was terrified and didn't know what else to say (v. 6). At this point God spoke to them out of the cloud and commanded them to listen to Jesus, God's beloved Son (v. 7), His "Isaac."

What can we learn from the reading about living our lives as Christians? Peter, my personal favorite among all of the disciples by a large measure, sought to be the "fixer" of the problem at hand. Not knowing what to say he just said the first thing that came into his mind. Which of us wouldn't have done the same thing? How many of us have gotten into trouble by not exercising good control of our internal filters and just saying what pops into our minds? The difference between Peter and us is that Peter had the first hand testimony of Jesus fresh in his heart. Technically, Peter wasn't mistaken in what he said, but God corrected him and told him to simply listen to Jesus instead of rushing in to fix perceived problems. That is good advice for all of us; just listen to Jesus by reading and understanding His words given to us through the Bible and not rushing in with both of our gun barrels blazing!

I remember one time many years ago when I was working as an engineer at Ford. I was attending a small luncheon party given in my honor as I was transitioning to a new department as a part of my rotational training program (the FCGP as readers may be familiar). While standing in line at the salad bar my boss gave me a very good complement and I immediately responded by saying the first thing that popped into my head. Instead of just accepting the complement, I denied it by saying that I really hadn't done a very good job! I knew immediately that I had messed up, but this wasn't something that was easy to take back. To this day, I regret my knee jerk response. Joe Wisniewski, if you ever read this, please accept my apology, and realize that I was acting somewhat like the Apostle Peter.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. In the first reading, we read about Abraham's willingness to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice to God. However, Isaac was also obedient and as we saw is a type of Christ. A second type is also evident in the reading. In what ways can you determine that Isaac a type of believer similar to you and me?

2. Pay attention to the "voices" or messages you hear coming to you on a regular basis. When you hear accusation and condemnation what is your natural response? Do you hide, pretend, or defend yourself? Alternatively, do you run to the Savior and remind yourself of truth? In the second reading, Saint Paul gives us a glimpse of God's heart for those who are in Christ. What concepts resonate with you and how will you seek to live in light of these truths?

3. Have you ever gotten yourself in trouble by saying the first thing that came into your mind? What was the particular circumstance, and is there any way in which you can be redeemed in your mind through what you read about in the Gospel lesson?

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/030115.cfm

First Reading GN 22:1-2, 9A, 10-13, 15-18

Second Reading ROM 8:31B-34

Gospel Reading MK 9:2-10

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 2-15-2015



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for 2-15-2015. This week we open with the first reading from Leviticus in which we see the procedure for dealing with the skin disease of leprosy. While this may not seem like a random passage to read, it becomes an important back drop for the New Testament and Gospel reading where we learn that whole-hearted obedience to which Jesus calls His followers.

The first reading is from the Book of Leviticus, this provides some insight into the incident between Jesus and a man afflicted with leprosy that we will see later in the Gospel lesson.

(Leviticus 13:1-2) 1 Then the LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying, 2 "When a man has on the skin of his body a swelling or a scab or a bright spot, and it becomes an infection of leprosy on the skin of his body, then he shall be brought to Aaron the priest or to one of his sons the priests.

(Leviticus 13:44-46) 44 he is a leprous man, he is unclean. The priest shall surely pronounce him unclean; his infection is on his head. 45 "As for the leper who has the infection, his clothes shall be torn, and the hair of his head shall be uncovered, and he shall cover his mustache and cry, 'Unclean! Unclean!' 46 "He shall remain unclean all the days during which he has the infection; he is unclean. He shall live alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp.

The Old Testament law gave specific regulations for the well-being of a community. One such regulation was that of infectious diseases. The disease of leprosy was could devastate a community, so God gave them instructions on how to deal with this problem. The person who had leprosy had to be inspected by the priest and separate himself from the rest of the people. This would be a dire diagnosis. The law also provided instructions for what a leprous person would do if they became healed. They must present themselves to the priest and offer a sacrifice (Lev. 14:1-32). This information will be important as we move toward the Gospel, since Jesus healed a man of leprosy. The priests would have had to dig out their law books to put this into practice, since being healed of leprosy was uncommon until Jesus came onto the scene.

The second reading is from Saint Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. In the context of this passage, Saint Paul addresses many issues that were perplexing the new believers in Corinth who had to make many decisions in a pagan culture. One of the decisions had to do with eating food that had been previously sacrificed to idols (1 Cor. 10:18-19). He says that the food does not inherently have anything sacrilegious about it, but one's motive was really the determining factor in all decisions for a godly life.

(1 Corinthians 10:31 – 11:1) 31 Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. 32 Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God; 33 just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit but the profit of the many, so that they may be saved. 1 Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.

Paul teaches that the underlying motive of the heart needs to be God's glory, no matter what we do. It's hard for us to imagine how eating or drinking can even have religious connotations, but he affirms that all of life can be sacred if done with God and His glory in mind. Part of God's glory is when we surrender our wants and demands in order to bring others to know Him. Paul laid down his Jewish food purity laws to reach the Gentiles living in a pagan culture. We may not have this same backdrop, but we can still be challenged by this to consider how our lives lived for God can be useful for ministering to others who are different than us. That is how we can imitate Paul and so imitate Christ.

An example of this very thing happened this summer when we were in France on a cultural discovery trip. After church, we were invited over for a very culturally French tradition called "aperitif." This tradition is a rare invitation to foreigners, so we felt honored to be invited to a French person's home. But we were not normally used to imbibing in strong drink in the middle of the day, especially right after church. We drank and enjoyed their hospitality with a clear conscience because of Paul's teaching. We were building bridges with people who needed to see the light of Christ in our lives and we met them on their turf for God's glory.

The Gospel lesson is from Mark Chapter one which continues from last week.

(Mark 1:40-45) 40 And a leper came to Jesus, beseeching Him and falling on his knees before Him,

*and saying, "If You are willing, You can make me clean." 41 Moved with compassion, Jesus stretched out His hand and touched him, and *said to him, "I am willing; be cleansed." 42 Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed. 43 And He sternly warned him and immediately sent him away, 44 and He said to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, as a testimony to them." 45 But he went out and began to proclaim it freely and to spread the news around, to such an extent that Jesus could no longer publicly enter a city, but stayed out in unpopulated areas; and they were coming to Him from everywhere.*

We see in this story the fulfillment of the Old Testament passage on leprosy we studied in the first reading. In those days there was no known cure for leprosy so you can imagine the desperation of anyone afflicted with the awful, skin eating disease. Several insights can be observed from this interaction. First, the leper knew he had a problem that he couldn't fix on his own. Second, he came humbly to Jesus, falling on his knees and asking him for healing. Even this early on in Jesus' ministry the man knew that Jesus offered a potential cure for his disease. Third, we see that Jesus had compassion on this desperate man and was willing to heal him. Fourth, in all probability the priests had never in all of Jewish history ever had the need to exercise the provisions in the Law for the confirmation of a leper's healing. Jesus instructed the man to go to the priest as commanded in the Law of Moses (v. 44). Mark may have included this interaction in order to confirm the evidence that Jesus was the promised Messiah, fulfilling the Law and the Prophets.

Unfortunately, the man failed to follow Jesus' order to not proclaim the source of his healing, but rather went and widely spread the news about this miraculous event. This story set the tone for Jesus' subsequent ministry in which throngs of people came to him for healing but at the same time neglected the weightier matters of the heart (Matthew 23:23).

What does this mean for us today? Like the leprous man, we too can be tempted to turn to God in times of crisis to heal our temporal circumstances, without being willing to completely follow Him in trusting obedience. It is easy for us to think we know better than Jesus in other matters of our lives that don't seem to be so desperate or even "spiritual." But as we saw in 1 Cor. 10:31, everything can be considered spiritual and done for God's glory. Having a trusting obedience is what glorifies God. In Luke's Gospel we find a circumstance where Jesus healed ten lepers, but only one of them returned to Jesus and thanked Him (Luke 17:11-19). Although God stands ready to help deliver us from our temporary circumstance, we need to be willing to look beyond them to see what God could be doing through them, so that He can be glorified in our lives.

When I was a teenager, I used to go out and party with my friends, and then drag myself to Mass the next morning. This type of compartmentalization was a subtle way for me to justify doing my own thing and still trying to be in good with God. I felt that by going to Mass I was earning points with Him to make up for the bad things that I did. Since then, I've come to understand that Jesus calls us to live an integrated life. I realized that I could not live an obedient life without God's help. I came to Jesus like the leper and fell on my knees and asked Jesus to heal me of the corruption and

discontinuity within my own heart. He was willing, just as with the leprous man. When we come to Him and ask Him to save us, He gives us His Spirit to help us live a unified life (John 14:16). We don't have to end up like the leprous man, who merely used Jesus to get his way. Instead, we can surrender to God and let Him have His way in and through us. This is the way of Christianity.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. In what ways can you relate to my story of how I lived during my teenage years? Are there still ways you are tempted to live a "compartmentalized" faith? What are the root issues that need to be confronted and confessed to Jesus, our one mediator (1 Tim. 2:5)?

2. How can you see your life choices fall under the umbrella of God's glory? We may not be able to do "spiritual" things all day, but if we are surrendered to God, everything we do can be spiritual and give Him glory. Are there ways that you can have this mindset at your job, in your family responsibilities and even as you interact with people who are different from you? How might your week look different if you sacrificed your preferences to serve others so that others might see Christ in you?

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/021515.cfm

First Reading LV 13:1-2, 44-46

Second Reading 1 COR 10:31—11:1

Gospel Reading MK 1:40-45

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB