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

Mass Study Notes for 9-13-2015



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **9-13-2015**. This week while I was studying the first reading from Isaiah Chapter 50 I came across an interesting commentary on a web site. This supposedly Christian pastor wrote about the identity of the servant figure in the reading either as the Nation of Israel as a whole, or perhaps as he said, "an individual person." Then he gave an analysis of verses 4 – 9a in which he never once identified the "servant" mentioned there with the Person of Jesus Christ. This contradicts the Gospel narrative who very clearly ascribed these exact events in describing the Passion of Jesus Christ (for example Matthew 26:67). This week we will study that reading from Isaiah and learn about what Jesus had to say in the Gospel reading about those who like the pastor I mentioned, deny or ignore that Jesus is the Christ of God presented by Isaiah. This week we will also learn from James about two types of faith, one that saves and one that does not. The key idea that runs throughout the three readings today is the faithfulness (or lack thereof) of God's servants.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from Isaiah 50 and is one of what is known as Isaiah's "Servant Songs." The Servant Songs prove in a powerful way that Jesus of Nazareth is God's Righteous Servant, the long awaited Messiah. As we mentioned in the introduction, some present day scholars (especially including Jewish writers) identify the servant in these songs as the entire Nation of Israel. This is true in a certain sense and especially about the one spoken of in the opening verses of Chapter 50 just prior to today's reading. Verse one reads, *"Thus says the LORD: Where is your mother's bill of divorce with which I put her away? Or which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you? No,*

because of your sins you were sold, and for your transgressions your mother was put away" (Isaiah 50:1). Clearly the Lord is using a figure of speech in referring to the Nation who went astray from Him and was sold into captivity for their sins. However, in contrast to the servant we will read in the subsequent verses, the servant figure implied in this verse is an unfaithful one. As we will see in the reading below, the Servant beginning in verse 5 is undeniably the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

The overall preceding context of today's reading is the preparation of Judah's return from captivity at Babylon, something we know happened during the times of Nehemiah. Isaiah had also just introduced the prophecy of the future captivity under a yet to be born ruler named Cyrus (Isaiah 44:28 – 45:1). This future Persian King would be responsible for the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem and is also called a servant or shepherd of God (Isaiah 44:28). Isaiah prophesies about both faithful and unfaithful servants, be they Jews or Gentiles like Cyrus. This same idea of faithfulness carries into the second reading today as well as the Gospel lesson in which Jesus is the faithful Servant of God. As you read, take careful note of the characteristics of the faithful Servant.

First Reading:

Isaiah 50:5-9 NAS95 5 The Lord GOD has opened My ear; And I was not disobedient Nor did I turn back. 6 I gave My back to those who strike Me, And My cheeks to those who pluck out the beard; I did not cover My face from humiliation and spitting. 7 For the Lord GOD helps Me, Therefore, I am not disgraced; Therefore, I have set My face like flint, And I know that I will not be ashamed. 8 He who vindicates Me is near; Who will contend with Me? Let us stand up to each other; Who has a case against Me? Let him draw near to Me. 9 Behold, the Lord GOD helps Me; Who is he who condemns Me? Behold, they will all wear out like a garment; The moth will eat them.

Although the Nation of Israel sinned, God was obedient in fulfilling His promises of redemption through His Servant Son Jesus Christ. The Servant (whom we know as Jesus) was obedient in doing all that God had for Him to accomplish (v. 5).Although Jesus was condemned by the then leaders of the world, He was obedient to God and looked to His Father for His ultimate vindication. In a similar way, we too are called to obey our Father God in accomplishing all the things He has for us to do and we will ultimately be vindicated when we meet the Lord.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is a continuation of the study from James we read last week but moving ahead to verse 14. The content of his teaching is the quality of true faith. Throughout the Bible, there are many examples of people possessing different qualities of faith, one that saves and one that does not. Rahab was commended for her saving faith by the author of Hebrews when he said, "By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had received the spies in peace" (Hebrews 11:31). Rahab was a prostitute in Jericho who received the two spies sent by Joshua and hid them in defiance of the King (Joshua 2:1-6). Had she not taken this bold step of faith she would have perished at the hands of the Israelites when they toppled the city. As we read from James we will see both kinds of faith, the kind that saves and expresses itself in godly actions

(Ephesians 2:10), and the kind that cannot save. It is this latter kind about which we will read later in the Gospel lesson about which Jesus said, "*For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels" (*Matthew 8:38).

Second Reading:

James 2:14-18 NAS95 14 What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? 17 Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself. 18 But someone may well say, "You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works."

James asks a hypothetical question, essentially "What good is a dead faith because a dead faith doesn't result in the salvation of one's soul" (v. 14). He then went on to illustrate the works that proceed from a person possessing such a dead faith. This person could say something like, "be warmed and filled" (v. 16b) to a person that is cold and hungry. There are two types of faith, that which can save and that which cannot. The faithful servant is one whose works manifest themselves into acts of service. This is a type of faith that can save, and does save a person (1 John 5:13). Although they are saved by God's grace through faith alone (Ephesians 2:8-9) this faith manifests itself in good works (Ephesians 2:10).

As we move onto the Gospel lesson, remember how in the first reading we saw how Isaiah portrayed Jesus as the faithful Servant Who willingly surrendered Himself to the vile treatment of His tormenters. In contrast, we also saw how Isaiah in the earlier verses spoke of the unfaithfulness of the implied servant figure, the Nation of Israel who was sold into captivity for their sin. In the Gospel lesson, we will see how Jesus is the faithful Servant of God and how Saint Peter boldly proclaims this message even though he misunderstood the nature of God's Servant Son.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading from Saint Mark begins Jesus' inevitable and irreversible journey to the cross. As we saw in the pleas of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah, in today's Gospel reading Jesus testifies about the difficult plan that His Father has for Him (Mark 8:31). The context of the reading is in Caesarea Philip. This is a place that I encountered during my trip to Israel that has an eerie sense about it, almost as if Jesus' conflict with Satan had somehow permeated the rocks of that place to this very day. As you read, keep in mind that the purpose of Jesus' miracles was to show the people Who He was, to bring them to repentance of their sins, and to move them to place their trust in Him for eternal life.

Gospel Reading:

The reading omitted verses 36-38 which have been included below.

Mark 8:27-38 NAS95 27 Jesus went out, along with His disciples, to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way He questioned His disciples, saying to them, "Who do people say that I am?" 28 They told Him, saying, "John the Baptist; and others say Elijah; but others, one of the prophets." 29 And He continued by questioning them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered and said to Him, "You are the Christ." 30 And He warned them to tell no one about Him. 31 And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. 32 And He was stating the matter plainly. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. 33 But turning around and seeing His disciples, He rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind Me, Satan; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's." 34 And He summoned the crowd with His disciples, and said to them, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. 35 For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. 36 For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? 37 For what will a man give in exchange for his soul? 38 For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels."

For the very first time Jesus revealed His Father's plan for Him which was to offer His body as the ultimate and final sacrifice during the Passover celebration. Jesus knew that He had to fulfill the plan His father had for Him exactly, including how and when He was to die. Jesus used the term "I am" in verse 27, something which His Jewish hearers would have known was a claim of divinity. In asking them who they thought He was, Jesus was clearly identifying Himself as God, the Suffering Servant of Isaiah, the One Who would offer Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. After Jesus had warned them not to tell anyone that He was the Christ (v. 30) although His miracles spoke profoundly about His nature (see John 10:25, "The works that I do in My Father's Name bear witness of Me"), He explained to His disciples "plainly" (v. 32) what was to happen to Him in Jerusalem. Note how the text says, "He **began** to teach them" (v. 31a, emphasis added) about this, because even after He rose from the dead His disciples still didn't understand. He told his disciples to keep quiet about His identity in order to fulfil the Father's timing for His life as the Jews were already seeking to kill Him (John 5:18). We see that in verse 32 Peter, the student, took Jesus, the Teacher, aside and began to rebuke Him! Jesus identification of Himself as the Suffering Servant from Isaiah didn't accord well with Peter's view of Jesus as the conquering Messiah. Peter unwittingly spoke for Satan in attempting to change Jesus' destiny on the cross, in the same way that Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness (Mark 1:12-13). We will say more about this below.

Peter, like many of us, was impulsive and frequently acted first and too stock of his actions later. After having spent the better part of three years, he was obviously upset that anyone would harm Jesus, especially the chief priests and scribes. He was clearly the leader of the group of twelve disciples and the first one and a representative of all twelve to whom were later given the "keys of the kingdom," meaning that He entrusted them with the dispersion of the Gospel message to the world. His main role was as a witness to the Jews (Galatians 2:8). Sometimes called the "first among equals," he played a leading role in the early church as can be seen in Acts Chapter 1 when he was the first to gather the ten remaining disciples in order to replace Judas Iscariot the traitor. Peter,

whose heart was changed by the Holy Spirit, was the first of the disciples to confess Jesus as the Messiah (Matthew 16:16-18). He was called a "pillar of the church" in Paul's Letter to the Galatians (Galatians 2:9) and acted as the de facto spokesman of the disciples (see Matthew 15:15, 18:21, 19:27, Mark 11:21, etc.). Peter couldn't bear the thought of losing his best friend and ministry partner for whom he had dedicated his life the past several years. Peter, like the Old Testament Prophets and Jesus, had also suffered from the constant persecution of the scribes and Pharisees, and one can only imagine his anger when Jesus told him that these nemesis would kill his Messiah!

Yes, the purposes of God had to be fulfilled through Jesus offering Himself as a Savior for our sins. Peter, who was overcome both with his passion and love of Jesus, was as Jesus said, also influenced by the Father of Lies (v. 32). The time of Jesus ministry was an era of extreme demonic activity. Almost a dozen times in the Gospels Jesus was confronted by a demon possessed person and cast it out of them (for example Matthew 9:33, Mark 7:26, Luke 4:33). Our enemy the devil seems to have a lot of capabilities, but we know for certain that Peter wasn't in any way "possessed by a demon." No, what happened in this incident was that Peter simply repeated a mantra that was implanted in the world by the father of the world (2 Corinthians 4:4), the father of lies (John 8:44), Satan, the devil himself. This lie was the Messiah would come and set up his eternal kingdom without the need for anyone to deal with their sin, either in a personal or corporal sense for all of Israel. The people of the god of this age (2 Corinthians 4:4) saw no need to humble themselves before God, repent of their sins, and allow God to give His life as the perfect, once for all sacrifice of sin forever (Hebrews 10:14). For a very brief instant Peter was conformed to this world, something about which Saint Paul later warned us when he said, "Be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your heart (Romans 12:2).

Concluding Thoughts:

In the introduction of today's lesson I mentioned a liberal preacher would studied the same text we read in Isaiah and came to a completely different conclusion regarding the identity of the figure in the song of the servant. Perhaps he was ashamed of Jesus so as not to offend his Jewish readers. As we saw in the Gospel reading, Jesus had a stern warning for those who would not confess Him as the Messiah. Jesus made a scary statement concerning this in today's Gospel reading about people who express that kind of faith. "*For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels*" (Mark 8:38). This pastor's denial of the obvious identity of Jesus in Isaiah 50 contrasts sharply with Peter who through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit recognized and confessed Jesus as the Christ. Peter's faith is the kind about which James spoke, the kind saves, the type that expresses itself through good works.

Throughout the readings today, we saw two types of servants, the faithful ones like Jesus and His true followers, and the unfaithful ones that God will send into permanent captivity, unlike the temporary condition suffered by the Nation of Israel. My prayer is that we will live boldly as faithful believers in the Lord Jesus by not denying Him, whether in print, in the ways that we treat others, or in the ways in which we are obedient in serving Him. What if **we** knew how and when we were going

to die? How now would we then live?

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. That faithful servant is one whose life is marked by good works done as a result of a heart changed by God, however, we all fall short in various ways (Romans 3:23). One of the areas in which I have caught myself falling into a trap over and over again in my marriage (and in other relationships) is to propose a five-point plan to fix someone once they have poured out their heart to me concerning their problems. Have you ever fallen into this type of sinful behavior? In light of what you learned today from the readings, how can you through God's power counteract this in the future?

2. Peter was the first to boldly express that Jesus was the Christ (Mark 8:29), but his confession ended up leading to Jesus' rebuke when his concept of the Christ didn't align with the Father's plan for Jesus which included suffering, death, and resurrection. Discuss in what ways you too have misconceptions about Jesus in your life. In what ways do you expect Jesus to do something in a certain manner or timeframe but find yourself frustrated when He accomplishes His plan in a contradictory manner?

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/091315.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 8-24-2014

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for 8-24-2014. This week we open with the first reading from Isaiah where we see and explain meanings of the phrase "the key of the house of David." Then we move to the second reading from Romans 11 where you will read many additional verses beyond what was published in the lectionary in order to understand the meaning of God's Word based on its context. Finally, we conclude with the Gospel message from Matthew 16 and study the meaning of a phrase similar to what we saw in the first reading, "the keys of the kingdom of heaven" in which Jesus emphasized the importance of Peter as the first among equals of the disciples.

Before we begin, I will briefly review the format and method of these weekly study notes. The format can be understood from the acronym A-B-C but starting from the "C" and working backwards: context, big idea, and application. First, we provide the full scriptural context of the text including verses that were omitted in the reading. We also provide the historical context along with the background and setting of the author. Second, we study the text in light of its historical context to determine the theological big idea. We develop this in light of a "Christological" focus, that is upon the redemptive message found throughout the Bible of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, whether in a future context as in the Old Testament or in a present or historical context as in the New Testament. We do not rely upon an allegorical interpretation but instead use the historical critical method and refer to the original languages and parallel passages whenever necessary. Finally, we provide several applications of the text for the present day Christian. Although there is usually only one main interpretation of the text, there are many possible applications. With these guiding principles in mind, let's move onto the first reading.

The first reading is from the Prophet Isaiah. The reading is a parenthesis in Chapter 22, meaning that it was a pause or temporary transition from the main theme. The theme that Isaiah was describing in the chapter before this parenthesis was the future destruction of Jerusalem that we know came over 125 years later in 586 B.C. Isaiah wrote just prior to the destruction of the Northern Kingdom by Assyria in 722 B.C. The context of the reading is that an evil man named Shebna, who was the secretary of the treasury under King Hezekiah, built for himself a royal tomb so that his name would be remembered after he was dead. Evidently, this Shebna was misappropriating funds

(see 2 Kings 18:18, 19:2, and Isaiah 36:3, 37:2). This reading includes verses 15-18 and verses 24-25, in order for you to read the whole section of Scripture.

> *15 Thus says the Lord GOD of hosts, "Come, go to this steward, To Shebna, who is in charge of the royal household, 16 'What right do you have here, And whom do you have here, That you have hewn a tomb for yourself here, You who hew a tomb on the height, You who carve a resting place for yourself in the rock? 17 Behold, the LORD is about to hurl you headlong, O man. And He is about to grasp you firmly 18 And roll you tightly like a ball, To be cast into a vast country; There you will die And there your splendid chariots will be, You shame of your master's house.'*
>
> *19 I will depose you from your office, And I will pull you down from your station. 20 Then it will come about in that day, That I will summon My servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, 21 And I will clothe him with your tunic And tie your sash securely about him. I will entrust him with your authority, And he will become a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. 22 Then I will set the key of the house of David on his shoulder, When he opens no one will shut, When he shuts no one will open. 23 "I will drive him like a peg in a firm place, And he will become a throne of glory to his father's house.*
>
> *24 So they will hang on him all the glory of his father's house, offspring and issue, all the least of vessels, from bowls to all the jars. 25 "In that day," declares the LORD of hosts, "the peg driven in a firm place will give way; it will even break off and fall, and the load hanging on it will be cut off, for the LORD has spoken." (Isaiah 22:15-25)*

God was angry with ungodly Shebna and Isaiah said that he would be deposed (v. 19) and replaced by godly Eliakim the son of Hilkiah (v. 20). Shebna squandered resources in order to build a tomb to enthrone his name in history (v. 16). The focus of the reading is upon the great contrast between Eliakim, a type of Christ, and Shebna, a type of AntiChrist, and by application (and prophesy) between Christ and the AntiChrist. Remember that a type is when persons (or statements) in the Old Testament prefigure the person of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. For example, the Prophet Jonah, who spent three days and nights in the belly of the great fish (Jonah 1:17) was a type of Christ, in the same way that Jesus spent three days and three nights in the belly of the earth (Matthew 12:40). Eliakim typified the Person of Jesus Christ (as we see in verses 21-24). Jesus, Isaiah prophesied, would "be entrusted with authority (v. 21), become a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah" (v. 21), and possess the "key of the house of David on his shoulder" (v. 24).

Jesus quoted from this passage, as we will see later in the Gospel lesson when He addressed Peter after this important disciple had confessed Jesus as the Messiah. There is a parallel between the trusted servant Eliakim and Peter the disciple of Jesus who came along much later. Both Eliakim and Peter were trusted servants, the latter so much so that Jesus said he would build His church upon him along with the other ten trusted disciples. There are other parallels that exist to the New Testament. The phrase in verse 22 "the key of the house of David" is very similar to a phrase used in

the Book of Revelation. Saint John, the author of the Book said, "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens, says this" (Revelation 3:7). John said that Jesus was the One Who "is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens" (v. 7). Jesus alone holds the keys to the kingdom.

The closing of this section of text is marked by a view of the end time tribulation period in which the false Christ, the AntiChrist typified by Isaiah as Shebna, will be taken down (v. 25, Revelation 19:19-20). Isaiah said that the AntiChrist, "the peg driven in a firm place will give way; it will even break off and fall, and the load hanging on it will be cut off" (v. 25). We can trust that the true Jesus will overcome the false Christ but not until God has tolerated the hardness of almost the entire world's heart against believing in the Gospel message. Though God will speak the Good News to the world all at the same time through the voice of an angel (Revelation 14:6), precious few will believe. During the end time period God will call and redeem all of Israel (Romans 11:26).

Something that we can take away from the first reading includes God's eventual judgment of sin. Shebna, though he was rich and powerful, was not immune to God's judgment and the consequences of trusting in himself to make it through life. This is the essence of what it means to be "anti-Christ"—having a posture of self-reliance. In contrast, the Christ-follower is one who recognizes his or her own need for a Savior and invites Jesus into the daily stuff of life in order to let Christ rule and reign in our hearts.

As we move onto the second reading, we need to include a substantial portion of text before the reading from the lectionary. The context is Paul's discussion about the future of Israel. Romans 9 dealt with Israel's past, Romans 10 with the present (in Paul's time), and Romans 11 with the future. As you read this first omitted section (vv. 25-32), keep in mind the study last week regarding the unfolding of the revelation of the mystery of God's plan of salvation for the Gentiles.

> *25 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; 26 and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, "THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB." 27 "THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS." 28 From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; 29 for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. 30 For just as you once were disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy because of their disobedience, 31 so these also now have been disobedient, that because of the mercy shown to you they also may now be shown mercy. 32 For God has shut up all in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all.*

Paul said that the reason God allowed the Jews to harden their hearts against the Messiah Jesus was to allow for the salvation of the Gentiles in the church. Now let's read the actual second reading.

> *33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! 34 For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR? 35 Or WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK TO HIM AGAIN? 36 For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen. (Romans 11:33-36)*

Paul marveled at the wisdom and knowledge of God (v. 33). How could God tolerate the hard hearted Jews in order to provide for the salvation of the Gentiles? The ways of God are unfathomable (v. 33). The implication of this for our own lives is multi-dimensional. As we go through life, there are so many things that are out of our control that we do not understand. We know that God has the power to change things—yet, sometimes he doesn't do things according to what we think is best. This is the crisis of faith. Will we trust that God is wiser and more knowledgeable than we ourselves are? Or will we rail at God for being unloving and incompetent in our lives? While God doesn't cause evil, He does permit it (as in allowing the hearts of the Jews to be hardened). There is a choice that each believer in God has to make at some point in their relationship with God: Am I going to trust God's ways or am I going to trust in my ways above His ways? Throughout the Bible God uses His divine agents to accomplish His work, be they angels, prophets, animals, or even people like us. As we transition to the Gospel lesson, meditate upon the depth of the wisdom of God in the past biblical record in order to trust Him in the midst of any present-day confusing circumstances for your own life.

The Gospel reading this week is from Matthew 16. Jesus had just been showing the disciples His supernatural power through the feeding of the 5,000 and a separate incident of feeding of the 4,000. After He did this Jesus warned them to beware of "the leaven of the Pharisees" (Matthew 16:11) and then He traveled with them to the region known as Caesarea Philippi. It is in this region that many pagans believed was the seat of the underworld, a place where immoral practices were done on a regular basis to appease the gods out from the "gates of hell." There were even niches carved out of the rock cliff in order to display the idols that were worshipped in this area. It is in this ominous and evil place that Jesus had a valuable lesson to teach His disciples.

> *13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" 14 And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." 15 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" 16 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." 17 And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. 18 I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven." 20 Then He warned the disciples that they should tell no one that He was the Christ. (Matthew 16:13-20)*

In the reading, Jesus clearly emphasized Peter as the foremost among the disciples and this along

with other New Testament readings indicate that this disciple was something like "first among equals." Jesus told Peter that He would build His church upon both Peter and his confession of Jesus as the Christ. As we delve further into the analysis of the reading, we ask our readers to contemplate how Jesus could lay any authority for giving the Gospel message to the world on anyone, even Peter. Peter, like many of us, was impulsive and impatient, always wanting to take actions but maybe never thinking things through as thoroughly as he would later in his life.

Several significant points jump out of the text. First, Peter, the uncontested leader or the disciples, made the marvelous statement through the help of God the Father that Jesus was indeed the Messiah (v. 16). Jesus affirmed his confession and went on to elaborate upon Peter's statement. What did Jesus mean when He told Peter, "upon this rock I will build my church" (v.18b)? Jesus' meaning is clear when we look one level deeper into the plain meaning found in the original language. Peter, whose name in Greek is "Petros", literally means "rock." However, the foundation on which Jesus spoke about building the church is a different Greek word "petra" which means a mass or rock. In context, what Jesus said was close to this paraphrase: "Simon, I am changing your name to Petros, and upon this petra (foundational mass of rock) I will build my church." Jesus said that He would build His church upon the foundation (petra, meaning mass of rock or many large rocks), which, in context, is Peter's confession that Jesus is the Christ. However, Jesus clearly indicated that Peter was the foremost of these building blocks, the "first among equals." Peter, with his heart changed by the Holy Spirit of God so as to confess Jesus as the Christ was the foundation of the church. Jesus entrusted this authority to him like what we saw with Eliakim in the first reading. Peter, as first among equals, shared this authority with the other disciples.

Peter clarified this meaning in the Book of First Peter. Peter said, "you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5). Although Peter used the word "lithos" for stone, he stated how the individual stones are built up into a holy priesthood of believers "through Jesus Christ." The church is the collection of spiritual rocks that are built on the "petra" or foundation that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matthew 16:16) through whom is the only way to eternal life (John 14:6).

Saint Paul used a similar analogy in explaining how God empowered him as the leader and builder of the church among the Gentiles (Ephesians 3:1), in the same way that Peter was the builder of the church among the Jews (Galatians 2:8). Paul said, "According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:10-11). In Ephesians Paul clarified how Jesus intended the church to interpret this passage by pointing out that our faith has "been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone" (Ephesians 2:20).

Paul used the symbolism of Jesus as the Rock or foundation in First Corinthians:

> *1 For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud*

> *and all passed through the sea; 2 and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; 3 and all ate the same spiritual food; 4 and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ. (1 Corinthians 10:1-4)*

When Paul said the "they were drinking from the spiritual rock" and "the rock was Christ" (v. 4) both times he used the word "petra." Jesus was the foundation stone, the One Who provided sustenance to the Hebrews escaping from the Pharaoh.

Jesus Himself explained the necessity of a sure foundation in Luke Chapter 6:

> *47 Everyone who comes to Me and hears My words and acts on them, I will show you whom he is like: 48 he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid a foundation on the rock; and when a flood occurred, the torrent burst against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. 49 But the one who has heard and has not acted accordingly, is like a man who built a house on the ground without any foundation; and the torrent burst against it and immediately it collapsed, and the ruin of that house was great. (Luke 6:47-49)*

When Jesus said, "he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid a foundation on the rock" (v. 48) the word in the original was "petra" The giant rock that was rolled to seal Jesus' tomb was a "petra" (Matthew 27:60). Peter **was** one of the foundational stone**s** (the apostles and prophets), but Jesus **is** the Chief Cornerstone, the Foundation of the Church. "For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day" (John 6:40).

Second, Jesus said that He "will give you the keys of the kingdom in heaven," and that whatever he bound on earth would be bound in heaven and whatever was loosed on earth would be loosed in heaven. We previously discussed this in the June 29, 2014 edition of Mass Notes. In summary, we said that the keys of the kingdom is salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. The binding and unbinding of sin is found in the gift of faith (Ephesians 2:8-9) when a person comes to the knowledge of Jesus Christ as their Savior. Peter and the other apostles were being sent out with authority to preach the Gospel (Matthew 28:18-20), which would be the entry point of faith. In a certain sense, they were being commissioned to open the doors of the Kingdom of God to others by their obedience in proclaiming the Good news and making disciples. We then see Peter is Acts 2:14-40 fulfilling this call by preaching a message of repentance and salvation in Jesus Christ. This is in line with Jesus' teaching when He said, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him" (John 3:36). Later, Jesus instructed the group of ten disciples (eleven less Thomas) gathered together in the upper room after His resurrection that anyone who believes in Him through the preaching of the Gospel will be saved. The keys of the Kingdom were being entrusted to this group of men who had been with Jesus in a personal way. They were going to be His hands and feet in the world from now on. And the story of the Gospel continues to penetrate lives because we are all commissioned to be his ambassadors, representing God's love and truth to the world with our lives and our proclamation of the Good news (2

Corinthians 5:20).

Finally, Jesus said, "the gates of Hades will not overpower it" (v. 18c), meaning that all of the evil will not be able to overcome the God-ordained movement of the church. The church is on the offensive, storming the "gates of hell" as was so symbolically portrayed by this incident happening at Caesarea Philippi. This is an important statement that no matter how awful the world may become, the power of Satan will never destroy God's church. We can rest in the fact that Jesus has overcome the world (John 16:33, 1 Corinthians 15:57) and through Him alone we can find the power to continue His commission of making disciples and teaching (Matthew 28:16-20).

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. In the Gospel reading, Jesus asked his disciples a very pointed question: "Who do you say that I am?" At some point, each of us has to answer this question. How does Peter's response resonate with you? Is this the foundation you are building your life on? If so, how does your life reflect this? If not, what foundation are you building your life on? Would you like Peter's response to be your response, too? You can pause and ask God to change the direction of your life so that you can build on the Chief Cornerstone, Jesus Christ.

2. In the Gospel lesson Jesus said, "the gates of Hades will not overpower it" (v. 18c), meaning that all of the evil will not be able to overcome the God-ordained movement of the church. Where do you see this passage intersecting with 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/082414.cfm

First Reading IS 22:19-23

Second Reading ROM 11:33-36

Gospel Reading MT 16:13-20

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB