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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 9-18-2016



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **9-18-2016**. Last week we looked at the Gospel of Luke and discussed the famous parable of the prodigal son. We saw as in the previous section of this Gospel that Jesus addressed the parable to the Pharisees. Remember that these people were the religious group who believed in strict adherence to Jewish Law, at least as they interpreted it, and also in life after death. This week later in this lesson we will return to the Gospel of Luke and pick up where we left off last week and cover the parable of the unjust steward.

Introduction to the First Reading:

We cannot know God apart from His revelation. One form of this revelation is the prophetic writings of the Old Testament. The reading for today is from Amos who is known as a "minor prophet." This is not because he was inferior to the others but because his book is shorter than some of the other prophetic books like Isaiah who is referred to as a "major prophet." Read the opening verse of Amos to get an orientation to the text.

The words of Amos, one of the shepherds of Tekoa– what he saw concerning Israel two years before the earthquake, when Uzziah was king of Judah and Jeroboam son of Jehoash was king of Israel (Amos 1:1).

The text says that Amos was a shepherd prophet, and that he spoke about "what he saw concerning Israel" and this was "when Uzziah was king of Judah and Jeroboam son of Jehoash was king of

Israel." From this we know that Amos' prophecy occurred during the time after the division of the people into the kingdoms of Judah in the south and Israel in the north. The split was brought about by the arrogance of King Solomon's son Rehoboam and as a result the ten northern tribes formed their own kingdom. Scholars date the events in Amos to around 760BC. Tekoa is a village located 5 miles south of Bethlehem, in the Kingdom of Judah, and was set upon a hill. Cities set upon hills were easy to defend and also had the advantage of being able to signal adjacent cities like Jerusalem. What an appropriate place for a prophet of God to be from, a city which spoke to other cities, not through a smoke signal or lantern but by the Word of God through their own Amos.

First Reading:

Amos 8:4-7 NAS95 4 Hear this, you who trample the needy, to do away with the humble of the land, 5 saying, "When will the new moon be over, So that we may sell grain, And the sabbath, that we may open the wheat market, To make the bushel smaller and the shekel bigger, And to cheat with dishonest scales, 6 So as to buy the helpless for money And the needy for a pair of sandals, And that we may sell the refuse of the wheat?" 7 The LORD has sworn by the pride of Jacob, "Indeed, I will never forget any of their deeds.

A frequent theme in the Book of Amos was the exploitation of the poor. This was a time of relative prosperity in the nations of Israel and Judah. The poor were evidently being taken advantage of by the rich. What was being pointed out here was that even during a holiday, which is what was meant by "when the new moon is over," and on the Sabbath day, the rich were plotting their future sleazy business deals. At a time when God called them to take time away from work to reflect upon Him they were plotting how to cheat the poor by "dimish(ing) the ephah" The ephah was the unit with which they measured grain. They were also plotting other ways such as cheating on the scales and adding to the value of their money. These people were the ultimate among unjust stewards. Even though everything that they ultimately came from God, including the holidays, the Sabbath day, and all that they owned, they even used their worship time to plot how they might defraud the poor. Their minds were not on God during their worship, but were instead focused upon their planning of how they were going to gain more wealth even at the cost of exploiting those less powerful than they. Even if their hearts were on God during their worship they would still have been guilty of defrauding the poor. These people were poor stewards of not only their physical resources but also their immaterial resources. This includes things like their intellect, influence, and power.

I am a high energy person and have frequently had some difficulty in focusing upon one certain thing at a time. My behavior doesn't end when the work week finishes and I head off to church on Sunday. No, I am guilty of frequently bringing all of my worldly cares and concerns into church on Sunday. I have learned that I need to begin to prepare my heart for worshiping God many hours before I actually arrive at church. For me this means limiting my consumption of coffee that morning along with consciously focusing upon God to the exclusion of outside thoughts. I have also discovered that praying before church tends to improve my concentration level for spiritual things before I come to church. God knows what is going on in our hearts when we go to church. Part of

being a good steward of our time, talents, and treasures involves the stewardship of our mind.

Often we feel burned out on Sunday morning. Sometimes when we show up at church on Sunday we have given all we have to our employer during the week and we really need that time to rest, just as God designed that day. But what about the rest of the week, do the pressures of life wear us down so much that we never get around to doing much to build God's kingdom? Have you ever felt like you really needed to do some certain thing for God, but you just never got around to doing it?

When we consider the stewardship of our mind, meaning the responsible planning and management of our mental resources, we need to consider a common fallacy that has come upon the people of America. The fallacy is that we can compartmentalize one activity in a part of our life while thinking that it doesn't affect the other areas. Back when I was teaching business classes inside the walls at several state prisons I used to use an illustration to explain this delusion. I drew on the board a circle and divided it into compartments each holding a little square. The geniuses in the class soon recognized that my crude drawing was a waffle. Next I started writing in each compartment of the waffle common activities with which the men may be engaged during any given week. I wrote things like "Go to class," "Go to lunch in the mess hall," "Read my Bible," and "Go to church on Sunday," all things that the men did while in prison. Then I wrote some other phrases, like "Look at a dirty magazine," and "Gossip about a classmate." Do we honestly believe that we can put sin into a little compartment and not have it affect the other activities in our life? Compartmentalization is nothing new, we can see that this was going on during the time of Amos the prophet.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from First Timothy. This is the first of what is called the Pastoral Epistles consisting of this Book along with Second Timothy and Titus. In the Letter, Paul is ministering to his spiritual son Timothy by advising him on spiritual matters in the church that was plagued with false teaching. This is evidenced by the opening of the letter in which Paul warns against false teaching in verse 3 of the first chapter. Paul said, "As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus so that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines" (1 Timothy 1:3). Today's reading in the second chapter address the subject of prayer but also reveals some timeless spiritual truths.

Second Reading:

1 Timothy 2:1-8 NAS95 1 First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, 2 for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. 3 This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. 5 For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time. 7 For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying) as a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth. 8 Therefore I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath

and dissension.

Paul urged the young Pastor Timothy to pray for everyone, not just believers including the government officials "so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity" (v. 2). Paul had taught earlier in Romans how God had ordained civil leaders. There he said, "Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God" (Romans 13;1). Paul's admonition to pray for them in this Letter with his saying "so that we may lead a quiet life" accords with what Paul said just two verses later in Romans. "For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil" (Romans 13:3a). Paul affirms that prayer on behalf of civil leaders is ordained by God in verse 3, then transitions to some timeless, spiritual truths.

Paul begins this section with saying how God wishes all people to be saved (v. 4). Next, he affirms that God is the only mediator between Himself and man, something that contradicted the teachings of the false teachers who placed mediators as intermediaries between themselves and God. This was because the Gnostics, among others who held to these false beliefs, taught that matter was bad and spirit was good. Therefore, there had to be another mediator other than Jesus because Jesus was a man in the flesh. Alternatively, they taught that Jesus couldn't have been God in the flesh because since the Spirit of God is good and the flesh is evil then Jesus couldn't have been God in the flesh. This necessitated various mediators including angels or ministers that intervened between God and man. This is a key point that Paul addressed with Timothy because another of the heresies being confronted was the Galatian heresy which held Christians bound not only to uphold the Jewish Law but also the continuance of a form of Levitical priesthood that interviewed between God and man. The emergence of this priesthood directly contradicted God's clear teaching on the priesthood of all believers as evidenced in 1 Peter 2:5-9. Paul closes this section by affirming his status as a leader of the church and especially to the Gentile believers (v. 7). Finally, he again calls upon the church to pray together in peace (v. 8).

There are two key points of application that arise from the reading. First, we are called to pray for all people including our civil leaders. "All me" means everyone, even our enemies (Matthew 5:44) and those with whom we don't agree. Second, we are to come to God directly and not through any intermediary because as believers there is no one who stands between God and us. The Holy Spirit said in the Book of Hebrews, "Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16). God teaches us to come boldly to Him in prayer through the one mediator, Jesus Christ who died for us (v. 5).

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading from Luke is the parable of the unjust manager. As in all of the parables, we seek to determine the main central truth that Jesus is teaching in light of the surrounding context. In this case the audience included the Pharisees who typified unjust managers and who were themselves lovers of money (Luke 16:14).

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Gospel Reading:

Luke 16:1-13 NAS95 1 Now He was also saying to the disciples, "There was a rich man who had a manager, and this manager was reported to him as squandering his possessions. 2 And he called him and said to him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an accounting of your management, for you can no longer be manager.' 3 "The manager said to himself, 'What shall I do, since my master is taking the management away from me? I am not strong enough to dig; I am ashamed to beg. 4 I know what I shall do, so that when I am removed from the management people will welcome me into their homes. 5 "And he summoned each one of his master's debtors, and he began saying to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' 6 "And he said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' And he said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.' 7 "Then he said to another, 'And how much do you owe?' And he said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.' 8 "And his master praised the unrighteous manager because he had acted shrewdly; for the sons of this age are more shrewd in relation to their own kind than the sons of light. 9 "And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by means of the wealth of unrighteousness, so that when it fails, they will receive you into the eternal dwellings. 10 "He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much. 11 "Therefore if you have not been faithful in the use of unrighteous wealth, who will entrust the true riches to you? 12 "And if you have not been faithful in the use of that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own? 13 "No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth."

This parable has been puzzling to many, but the interpretation is really quite simple. Had we read the next two verses we would have found that the Pharisees to whom this was addressed understood the parable quite well.

The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus.

He said to them, "You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight. (Luke 16:14-15)

The rich man in the story is God who is the provider of all things, both to believers and also non-believers. The unjust steward is a lazy but creative, non-believer who used his God-given creativity to achieve his worldly self-satisfying purposes. The children of light represent all believers. The big idea is quite simple. God calls believers to use everything that he has given us to build up His kingdom. If non-believers are creative for worldly purposes then believers are called to a higher standard of stewardship for the kingdom of heaven. The parable also address the trap which the Pharisees fell into, for they were lovers of money (see Luke 16:14). As believers we are to use our money to worship God and not worship money and use God. This was where the Pharisees went wrong, the used God and worshipped money. Again, we are to use money to worship God, not worship money and use God.

I remember an occasion while teaching in the prison during which I caught a student cheating on an exam. He had completed the exam using a pencil. When I handed back the paper the following week showing the errors, he came to me after class and said that I had made a mistake. He said that I had marked several answers wrong when really he had entered the correct choice on the multiple choice questions. I could see that he had neatly erased his answer and circled the correct one. He showed great ingenuity in his cheating. I didn't think that anyone would try this again but just to be sure the next time I gave an exam I ran copies of all of the exams. Sure enough the same student approached me with the same complaint. Imagine his surprise when I pulled out the copy of his original exam and compared it to the one that he had just handed back to me! Some people are creative for worldly, sinful purposes. In contrast imagine God's joy when we use the talents that He gave us for the greatness of His Kingdom.

God calls us to use the ingenuity that He granted to us in the same measure that was given to us. He also calls us to use our talents to further His kingdom. The business people mentioned in the Book of Amos evidently believed they could compartmentalize their thinking and succeed in using their creativity to steal from the poor. God condemned them not only for their actions but also for their thoughts. These "unjust stewards" were creative in the use of their God-given resources but used their creativity to steal from the poor rather than in doing what God commanded them by helping those less fortunate. This NT parable gives an example to challenge how we approach our own stewardship of the resources God has given to us. If ungodly people are motivated to use their resources for their own selfish benefit, how much more should Christ followers use their resources (material and immaterial) for higher purposes and God's glory?

Examine some insights that I put together as well as insights mu business students shared when we talked about this particular parable.

- The manager was willing to go to great, very creative and insightful lengths to secure his position in some future job or living situation. As spiritual people are we willing to go to these great lengths to grow the kingdom of God?
- As believers in Christ we must be aware of the struggle between God and money, we can't worship two gods, only the True God. Money can become our god, and compromise our way of life.
- As Americans we struggle with compartmentalized thinking. We may practice the things of God on Sunday but not give them much thought the rest of the week. How many of us read some devotional materials this morning? We put the things in God in several compartments but they don't "flavor" or run over into the others like work, school, driving to work, working out, relating to our family members, and how we spend our free time and money.
- Often times when we look at a church website we will find something of grade-school quality, when unbeknown to us we have a half-dozen web developers that attend our church and would never let something like this get posted on the web while at their workplace.
- We should not be surprised to find out that our boss was a Christian, this should already be evident to us. If we ran into him at a church event we should not be surprised. The same should be true in reverse about us, do others KNOW that we are a Christian?

- We should be willing to go to great lengths to grow the kingdom of God using whatever worldly resources are available.
- We should evaluate how compartmentalized our lives are, and where do we fall on a scale of worshiping God vs. money? The worship of money is very subtle, so asking this so directly is not helpful because we defend ourselves and say, "of course we don't do that."
- These changes come about through God, we must pray and ask Him to deliver us from our false thinking. We are new creations in Christ, and old things have passed away. Any empowerment that we have towards true change will only come from God.
- Jesus gave us two metaphors – salt and light, that teach us that Christianity is designed not to just be a minor part of the society, but the defining part. Salt permeates! It flavors! It arrests corruption! Similarly, Christianity should influence everything it touches and arrest the decay of a society that is tending toward corruption.

In closing let me tell a story about a special person in my life. After I moved to Indiana I met a man that worked in the cafeteria at the local college. He was a gently and unassuming kind of man and he had a certain unusual look about him. I struck up a conversation with him one day and over a period of years built a relationship with him. Dean had a mild learning disorder but continued to be a very diligent employee at the college and is one of the longest serving members of the school. As I got to know Dean I realized many valuable lessons.

Dean was man that used everything that he was given to serve God. He worked hard in the cafeteria and was a friend to many students. He volunteered to film every basketball game and served the team in other ways. He worked at his church on Wednesday night and Sunday morning in the children's ministry. Dean began volunteering for the local jail ministry and used his excellent singing voice to praise God to the men in the county jail. This requires his attendance at an early morning meeting on both Saturday and Sunday. On Sunday he goes to the local retirement community to sing at their afternoon church service. Dean also offers his house for a very nominal rent for students to stay. These are just the things about which I am aware, the list goes on.

Well, one day we were at an evening church service and a lady gave a moving testimony about some difficulties she was having in her life. All of us sat there listening with what we thought was deep compassion but Dean got up and walked out. Everyone wondered why he would interrupt the focus at that critical time by leaving. He came back a minute later and walked up to the woman and handed her a couple of tissues with which to dry her tears. That says it all about Dean. Dean uses his time, talent, and treasure in serving God. If anyone in the community tried even half as hard as Dean they could change the world. I tell my wife that, "It doesn't really matter because when we get to heaven we will all be working for Dean anyway."

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. In the first reading we saw how in the reading from Amos some teaching on honest stewardship. This dovetailed nicely with the Gospel lesson on the parable of the unjust manager. What are some ways in which people cheat in our modern society? How does knowing understanding God's high

regard for "honest scales" and proper treatment of the poor enable you to counter these modern ways of cheating?

2. God has provided our time, talents, and treasures. With your answer to the first question in mind, pray that Jesus would show you what He would have you do for His Kingdom as a steward of those three areas. After you pray record your thoughts in your journal. What are some things towards which God may be calling you to action? Here are some thought starters:

Time: Where are you spending your time each day? What are the largest time wasters in your life?

Talents: What talents has God given you?

Treasures: Where are you spending your money or using the things you have or inherited?

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/091816.cfm

Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Lectionary: 135

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 5-18-2014

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for 5-18-2014. This week we open with a reading from Acts and then return to our study on First Peter. Then we conclude with a Gospel lesson from John 14. As I write this, I am preparing to travel to France with a group of students to experience the culture there for the next two weeks. From there I am visiting an aunt and uncle in Belgium, the uncle that has spent his life researching the Church and as a professor at the American University of Leuven.

The first reading is from Acts 6. Here we see how God put it into the hearts of the disciples to organize the early church by dividing the duties among serving and preaching.

> *1 Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. 2 So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. 3 "Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. 4 "But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." 5 The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. 6 And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them. 7 The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith. (Acts 6:1-7)*

First, note that Stephan, one of the man who was selected to serve was martyred in the very next

chapter because of his powerful speech to the unbelieving Jews. A point that can be observed is although believers may have specific, non-ministry roles all of us are called to give testimony for Jesus. Saint Peter said, in the context of enduring suffering Christian testimony, "but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence" (1 Peter 3:15). Second, note that the disciples prayed for God's confirmation and blessing upon their decision (v. 6). Prayer is an essential first step when making decisions of any kind, but especially those dealing with the organization and carrying out of God's ministry. Finally, note that "a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith" (v.7). Though many of the Jews rejected Christ, God reached many of the Jewish leaders in order to rapidly build His Church (v. 7, "The word of God kept on spreading"). This conversion led to the priesthood of all believers, a mystery that we will see was revealed in the second reading from today.

Moving onto the second reading, we return to the Book of First Peter. The context of the message is persecution of believers. Here we see the mystery of the priesthood of all believers revealed, through the symbolism of stone building blocks with Jesus as the Chief Cornerstone, the One Whom the builders, aka the Jews, rejected.

> *4 And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, 5 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. 6 For this is contained in Scripture: "BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A CHOICE STONE, A PRECIOUS CORNER stone, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED." 7 This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve, "THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE VERY CORNER stone," 8 and, "A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE"; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed. 9 But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;(1 Peter 2:4-9)*

The main idea from this text is that God is building His Church out of precious building blocks of people, the foremost of whom is Jesus Christ, the "living stone which has been rejected by men" (v. 4). This Church is made up of spiritual stones (believers) all of whom are priests in the eyes of God (v. 9), since the Jewish Levitical priesthood has passed away. Jesus is our High Priest (Hebrews 4:14), the only mediator between us and God (1 Timothy 2:5, the byline of this ministry). Jesus is of the line of Melchizedek (Hebrews 7:17), not the line of Aaron that has passed away. One of the reasons that Stephen was stoned after his appointment in Acts 6 that we read in the first reading was because of his teaching about the passing away of the Old Testament Levitical priesthood. We can celebrate the fact that Jesus' priesthood will never pass away, and that we join with Him as spiritual priests for His service.

The main theme of the Book of First Peter that was have studied over the past several weeks has

been the suffering of believers. The Gospel reading today provides some insights into things that believers can look forward to in order to endure suffering in their daily lives. The Gospel lesson this week is from John Chapter 14. This is one of those sections of Scripture about which we say, "if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that would be written" (John 21:25). This contains some of the richest teaching from Jesus of anywhere in the New Testament. As you read take note of repeated words and phrases which provide indications of the subjects that Jesus emphasized during His message to the disciples in the upper room of the Last Supper just before He went to Calvary.

> *1 "Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. 2 In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. 3 If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also. 4 And you know the way where I am going." 5 Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, how do we know the way?" 6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me. 7 If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him." 8 Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." 9 Jesus said to him, "Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? 10 "Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works. 11 Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me; otherwise believe because of the works themselves. 12 Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do; because I go to the Father." (John 14:1-12)*

This section is unique in that it contained two sets of repeated words and phrases each of which was repeated three times. First, Jesus emphasized His divinity by using the phrase "I am" three times, a phrase that appeared throughout John's Gospel just before Jesus gave himself to the people to be crucified for the sins of the world. The disciples would have recognized this phrase as a strong statement of divinity. Although their eyes were blinded to the reality of the events that Jesus predicted concerning His death and resurrection, they would later remember this event after he rose from the dead. No one used this phrase about himself unless they were God. Second, Jesus repeated the phrase "believe in Me" three times during his final message to His disciples on that last Passover meal with them. As in any Bible study, repeated words provide an insight into the subject that was being emphasized by the Gospel writer under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21). In the case the big idea of the message was that because Jesus is God the world is to believe in Him.

As we said in the introduction, entire collections of books could be written about this section, even about just a single verse. Let's consider a portion of one verse in detail, something that spoke particularly to us as we studied Jesus' message. Verse 3 provided several powerful insights into not only Jesus' mission and how He served us, and a glimpse into our future with Him.

3 If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.

Jesus said:

"If." Jesus had the choice to either follow the will of the Father, or to forsake the eventual suffering and just save Himself. Jesus said in Luke, "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done" (Luke 22:42). Jesus chose suffering and death for us. Saint Paul said, "Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:8).

"I go." Nobody else could go to redeem us from our sin, Jesus had to go for us as a substitute, the perfect lamb of God. Saint Peter said, "and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed" (1 Peter 2:24). Jesus said in verse six that He was the only to God for us. "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me."

"to prepare a place." Jesus went to heaven with a mission to prepare a place for us to come to, either when we die or when He comes to gather His church (1 Thessalonians 4:17). Jesus was a carpenter, but the city to which He went to prepare was most likely a heavenly place, the "New Jerusalem" referred to in several places in the Bible including Galatians 4:26, Hebrews 11:10, Hebrews 12:22–24, Hebrews 13:14), but it is most fully described in Revelation 21. John spoke in the Book of Revelation about this glorious place, "And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband" Revelation 21:2)

"for you." Jesus died for us because "all of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). "The penalty for our sins is death" (Romans 6:23a) but because Jesus gave Himself for us "the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23b). We can't do anything to earn it. Paul said, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

"I will come again." Jesus is going to come again. First, He will come to gather His church, first the saints that have already died, and then those that remain. Second, Jesus will return to pass judgment upon entire earth. Paul said about this first event:

"14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. 15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord "(1 Thessalonians 4:14-17)

John said about this second event:

"11 And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war. 12 His eyes are a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems; and He has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself. 13 He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. 14 And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses. 15 From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty" (Revelation 19:11-15).

As believers in the risen Jesus Christ our Lord, we can be comforted by the fact that we are in the first group. We are of those who will be met by Jesus when we die (John 14:3), or are taken by Him (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

As we conclude the study for the Mass this week, let's focus upon something that Jesus said in the Gospel. Our Lord said, "I will come again and receive you to Myself" (John 14:3). The first Person that we see after we die will be Jesus Christ Himself! What a comfort this can be to us as we journey through difficult days "topside," as I like to say.

Have a great week.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. People around us, even those that go to church, have many different beliefs about how people get to God when they die. Some believe that they must be a good person, follow the Golden Rule (Matthew 7:12), and be something like at least 51 percent good and no more than 49 percent bad. What did Jesus say was the only true way to come to God? Using what you learned today, write a paragraph about how you would lovingly explain to someone holding a false belief about how to make it to heaven.

2. You read a verse in Revelation 21 about the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:2). That chapter contains many comforting verses to believers in Jesus regarding the place Jesus is preparing for us and the way in which God will comfort us after our trials here on earth. Read that entire chapter of Revelation and answer the following question.

How did the study of Revelation 21 provide you with a blessing as promised by God in Revelation 1:3, "blessed are those who read this Book"?

Readings for the Week

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

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass visit this web site: http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/051814.cfm

First Reading ACTS 6:1-7

Acts 6:1-7 NAS95 1 Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. 2 So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. 3 "Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. 4 "But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." 5 The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. 6 And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them. 7 The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.

Second Reading 1 PT 2:4-9

1 Peter 2:4-9 NAS95 4 And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, 5 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. 6 For this is contained in Scripture: "BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A CHOICE STONE, A PRECIOUS CORNER stone, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED." 7 This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve, "THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE VERY CORNER stone," 8 and, "A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE"; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed. 9 But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

Gospel Reading JN 14:1-12

John 14:1-12 NAS95 1 "Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. 2 "In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. 3 "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also. 4 "And you know the way where I am going." 5 Thomas *said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, how do we know the way?" 6 Jesus *said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me. 7 "If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him." 8 Philip *said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." 9 Jesus *said to him, "Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? 10 "Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works. 11 "Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me; otherwise believe because of the works themselves. 12 "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do; because I go to the Father.

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB