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 Sunday 8-9-2015



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **8-9-2015**. This week we open with the first reading from First Kings in which we find the great Prophet Elijah running away from wicked Queen Jezebel. The story reminds us that God will provide for us in order to accomplish the works that He has in store for us. Then we move to the second reading from Ephesians, which helps us to see what the contrast is between living as a child of the world and living as a child of God. Then we close with the continuing study on Jesus in John 6 where he confronts the unbelieving people by calling Himself the "bread of God."

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from First Kings and deals with the Prophet Elijah who was a mighty man of God in a dark era in Israel during the decline of the theocratic kingdom. This period followed the time of the Judges in which the Scripture said, "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25). There were bright spots in this age and one of them was the prophet Elijah. Elijah was perhaps best known for the incident recorded in First Kings 18 during a time of severe famine in Samaria. According to the Scripture Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal as to whether they could bring fire down on their sacrifice by calling on their god while Elijah would offer his sacrifice to God and ask Him to send fire to complete his burnt offering. The Priests of Baal began calling upon their god and cutting themselves in order to invoke a response, but failed miserably. Next, Elijah was so certain the God would act upon his request that he soaked the wood with water (1 Kings 18:33). He prayed a simple prayer and asked God to bring down fire on the sacrifice. With a dramatic display of power, God burned up not only the entire sacrifice, but the fire

licked up the water as well. Afterwards, Elijah had the Priests taken captive and then put them to death (v. 40). What an amazing victory Elijah had that day! After such an important victory one would think that Elijah would have continued his momentum and never suffered from any sort of worry. If God could light even wet wood on fire in front of the pagan priests Elijah could accomplish anything by calling upon the only true God in prayer. At least that is what one may think. Leading up to today's reading, soon afterwards the Scripture records that Elijah fell into a period of deep anxiety because of the actions of a certain ungodly woman named Jezebel. Jezebel was the evil wife of King Ahab, a king of Northern Israel. Immediately after Elijah's victory over the Prophets of Baal, wicked Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah saying, "So may the gods do to me and even more, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time (1 Kings 19:2b). His response was to flee for his life because of Jezebel's threat. "And he was afraid and arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree; and he requested for himself that he might die, and said, 'It is enough; now, O LORD, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers'" (vv. 3-4). Later, Elijah fled even further into the mountains to hide in a cave (1 Kings 19:9). How could such a mighty man of God, who had just witnessed God's dynamic power in the victory over the Prophets of Baal find himself holed up and worrying in a dark cave? If a mighty man of God like Elijah could suffer with anxiety, it's no wonder that Christians can also fall into patterns of worry.

This leads us to today's reading in which we find Elijah on the run from wicked Queen Jezebel.

First Reading:

1 Kings 19:4-8 NAS95 4 But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree; and he requested for himself that he might die, and said, "It is enough; now, O LORD, take my life, for I am not better than my fathers." 5 He lay down and slept under a juniper tree; and behold, there was an angel touching him, and he said to him, "Arise, eat." 6 Then he looked and behold, there was at his head a bread cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. So he ate and drank and lay down again. 7 The angel of the LORD came again a second time and touched him and said, "Arise, eat, because the journey is too great for you." 8 So he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mountain of God.

Even though Elijah was fresh from his mighty victory, he fled in fear to the wilderness and asked the Lord to take his life (v. 4). God responded to his prayer in a different way by sending an angel to provide fresh food for him (vv. 5-6). After Elijah ate and rested the first time, the angel came back to him again and caused him to eat a second time (v. 7). Subsequent to these two meals, Elijah traveled without food for forty days and nights until he reached Mt. Horeb (v. 8). Evidently, God miraculously delivered Elijah through this extended period of fasting in a similar way that He did when Jesus Christ fasted for a forty-day period (Matthew 4:2). We are not told whether the bread that God provided to Elijah allowed this extended fast but in all likelihood the two meals given to him were for

the purpose of lifting his spirits to the point that he continued on his journey to Mt. Horeb. These things happened at the end of Elijah's earthly existence, as shortly after these events he appointed Elisha to be his successor and was then taken up into a cloud.

What can we learn from the reading? Even though we may despair of living because of the impossible obstacles we face, God will provide for us when we call upon Him. He may or may not use his angelic helpers in the way that He did for Elijah, but we can trust that God will not leave us or forsake us (Deuteronomy 31:6, Hebrews 13:5). God knows in just what manner and quantity to provide for us the things that will move us to the next step in accomplishing the plans that He has for our lives.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from Ephesians 4 and shows us the contrast between life as a non-believer and a believer in Christ. It reminds us that our hearts need to be in right relationship with God in order for our outward behavior to reflect God's value system.

Second Reading:

Ephesians 4:30 – 5:2 NAS95 30 Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. 32 Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. 1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; 2 and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.

Saint Paul called the people in the Ephesian church not to grieve the Holy Spirit of God by carrying out sinful thoughts in their hearts and engaging in ungodly behaviors. The emphasis for changed behavior is a changed heart. A changed heart comes from being in a right relationship with God through faith in Christ. When we put our faith in Jesus Christ, we are "sealed for the day of redemption" by the Holy Spirit (4:30, see also 2 Corinthians 1:22; 5:5; Ephesians 1:13-14). God has placed upon each believer the seal of redemption through His Holy Spirit and this invisible marking is His certification that He will deliver upon what He has promised. What this means is that we are now inhabited by the very presence of God through His Spirit. Where we go with our thoughts and with our body, we take God with us. Because God lives in us, we are a new creation, the old way of life has gone and a new way of life has come (2 Corinthians 5:17). The Holy Spirit helps us to see our lives and the world from God's perspective. We can now make decisions based on God's value system, which is in sharp contrast to the world's value system.

Christians are not to have any part in the ungodly behaviors that are associated with the unbelieving world. These behaviors are generated from a "me-first" mentality that is easily offended, resulting in bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander and malice. You can see the progressive nature of sin as it takes on more and more momentum to divide us from others and actually engage in hurtful ways of interacting with others. This is a reflection of the value system of the god of this age, the devil, who

is the father of those who do not have God as their father (John 8:44).

Instead, Paul called the people to emulate God through the model of Jesus Christ who willingly sacrificed Himself, not as a victim, but through His own choice (John 10:18). When we receive God's kindness, tenderness, forgiveness and love, we become children of God (John 1:12) and our hearts are shaped by this new value system. We begin to do things more like God our Father and less like our former father. Titus 2:11-13 corroborates this when it says: "The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age as we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearance of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us, to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people of his very own, eager to do good (NIV)."

This means that "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it" (1Corinthians 10:13). In the same way that God provided for Elijah's physical and emotional needs when He asked, God will also provide the things we need in order to serve Him. This includes the ability through His power to forsake the ungodly behaviors that Paul listed in the reading.

How can we apply this to our lives? This reading is helpful to consider as we interact with others throughout the week and before we partake of communion. God's love transforms how we approach relationships and the community of believers. Communion has in its very word the idea of common unity. The church comes together to participate in remembering God's way of interacting with us, which is typified by Christ's sacrifice on the cross for our sins. As a result, our way of interacting with others changes as well. Communion reminds us of Jesus' admonition in Matthew's Gospel about asking forgiveness from a person we may have offended before we bring an offering to God. "Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering" (Matthew 5:23-24). When we partake of communion we shouldn't grieve the Holy Spirit of God (Ephesians 4:30) by clinging to ungodly feelings towards others and bringing this into the celebration of remembrance of our Lord's death which took the place for the penalty for our sins. Instead of coming with thoughts of wrath, anger, slander, and bitterness (vv. 30 – 31) we have been changed so that we can come with minds cleansed from these things and present to God hearts filled with kindness, tenderness forgiveness, and love (vv. 32 – 4:1).

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading is a continuation of the story that was started last week. The context is Jesus' teaching of the crowds that followed him after His feeding of them through the multiplying of the loaves and fishes in the closing of Chapter 5.

Gospel Reading:

John 6:41-51 NAS95 41 Therefore the Jews were grumbling about Him, because He said, "I am the bread that came down out of heaven." 42 They were saying, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does He now say, 'I have come down out of heaven'?" 43 Jesus answered and said to them, "Do not grumble among yourselves. 44 No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day. 45 It is written in the prophets, 'AND THEY SHALL ALL BE TAUGHT OF GOD.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me. 46 Not that anyone has seen the Father, except the One who is from God; He has seen the Father. 47 Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life. 48 I am the bread of life. 49 Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. 50 This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. 51 I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh."

The main point of Jesus' teaching is that belief in Him is the only way to obtain eternal life and be restored to right relationship with God the Father. Repeating our statement from last week, Jesus' point in this particular teaching wasn't whether or not He is spiritually present in the elements of communion. These issues were not even a part of the mentality of the Jewish people that He was addressing.

The passage opens with the grumbling of the Jews in disbelief against Jesus' claim to be the Messiah. They point to His human origins as proof that He could not be God's promised Messiah (v. 42). They believed that only God or possibly an angel can come down from heaven. Since some in the crowd knew Jesus' earthly father and mother they couldn't accept His statement that He came down from heaven. We know from John 7 that the people held to a tradition about the nature of the Messiah. There they said, "However, we know where this man is from; but whenever the Christ may come, no one knows where He is from" (John 7:27). Jesus cut to the heart of the issue which was their unbelief in God. Earlier Jesus had told them:

John 5:37-40 NAS95 37 "And the Father who sent Me, He has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time nor seen His form. 38 You do not have His word abiding in you, for you do not believe Him whom He sent. 39 You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me; 40 and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life."

This leads us to the central point of the story: the only way to God the Father is through belief in Jesus the Son (v. 47). For "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him" (John 3:36). Jesus said that they could not come to Him because the Father was not drawing them (v. 44). But we know that God wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4). It seems that their hard-heartedness and lack of being willing to be "taught of God" was preventing them from being drawn to faith in Jesus. If they would let themselves hear and learn from the Father, then Christ's divinity

would be obvious to them. Then they would come to Him and have assurance of a life that is eternal (v. 44b). By offering resurrection life, Jesus is overtly claiming His deity. He continues to make claims of divinity by saying that He is the One who was sent by the Father and has seen Him (vv. 45-46). It is with this backdrop that Jesus makes a bold claim, emphasized by the phrase, "Truly, truly," which is basically putting His word on the same level as Holy Scripture, infallible and inerrant. He says, "he who believes has eternal life" (v. 47).

In order to unpack this a little more, he uses an analogy that the Jews would have been familiar with from the Pentateuch (the first 5 books of the Old Testament). He harkens back to the days when the Hebrew people were in the wilderness and ate manna, which was a supernatural food that God provided for them (see Mass notes from last week). Even though they ate this supernatural food, their bodies still died. Jesus was claiming to be more than manna, He is the "manna" (or bread) that brings life to the soul (John 10:10). Being in relationship to Him who is the resurrection and the life, allows one to live eternally, even if the body dies (John 11:25). When Jesus said "and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is my flesh," he was referring to His bodily sacrifice that He would make to bring atonement for our sins. The Old Testament set a precedent for the need for a blood sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins (Hebrews 9:22). So Jesus was showing that His impending death would be that sacrifice required by the Law to forgive us of our sins (1 John 2:2).

What can we learn from this reading to apply to our lives? When we celebrate communion we remember how Jesus gave up His life to bear the penalty for our sins. When we take of the bread, we remember His body that was broken on the cross for us. When we partake of the cup, we remember Jesus' blood that was poured out for us. Before we partake of communion we should examine our hearts in preparation. We can ask ourselves if we too have become so familiar with Jesus that we overlook that He is God? In addition, when this world starts getting to us, we can look to Him for life that is truly life, realizing that this world is not our home. We walk by faith that someday we will be with Him and all things will be made right. We can also be a spokesperson for God, sharing with others the wonderful opportunity to be made right with the Father through Jesus.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. We said about the second reading:

God has placed upon each believer the seal of redemption through His Holy Spirit and this invisible marking is His certification that He will deliver upon what He has promised. What this means is that we are now inhabited by the very presence of God through His Spirit. Where we go with our thoughts and with our body, we take God with us. Because God lives in us, we are a new creation, the old way of life has gone and a new way of life has come (2 Corinthians 5:17). The Holy Spirit helps us to see our lives and the world from God's perspective. We can now make decisions based on God's value system, which is in sharp contrast to the world's value system.

In what ways do you bring God into your relationships? In your work life? In your relationship with you wife? In relationship to nonbelievers?

2. Reflect upon the last time you celebrated communion. Was your heart focused upon the Lord Jesus' sacrifice for you?

Saint Paul gave us a clue as to the importance of the celebration of communion. He said in 1 Corinthians 11:30 about those who were doing so in an unholy manner, "For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep." Although his words were in the context of the full love feast he indicated the sincere need to examine our motives as we celebrate communion. In light of what we studied today, the next time you take communion examine your heart and sincerely prepare for the remembrance of Jesus dying on the cross for you sins.

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/080915.cfm

First Reading 1 KGS 19:4-8

Second Reading EPH 4:30—5:2

Gospel Reading JN 6:41-51

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Mass Study Notes for Sunday 7-12-2015

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **7-12-2015**. This week we open with Amos 7: 12-15 as Amos, a simple farmer, is called by God to prophesy in Israel. Then we move to Ephesians 1:3-14 where Paul explains all the blessings that are available to those who are in Christ. Finally we conclude with Mark 6: 7-13. Here Jesus sends out His disciples to minister and instructs them to trust God for their daily needs as they call people to repentance.

Introduction to the First Reading:

Imagine you are an ordinary farmer, minding your own business, tending your sheep and your crops. Suddenly God commands you to go to a neighboring land and pronounce judgment on its rebellious people. No one wants to be the bearer of bad news. Yet sometimes God called men to be prophets, foretelling God's plan and delivering God's words of warning and judgment. God's intention was never to simply punish people. His ultimate desire was to restore His wayward children back to Himself. Amos, however, was not a prophet, nor even the son of a prophet. He was simply a farmer trying to make a living in Judah during the time of the divided kingdom.

You may remember that the twelve tribes of Israel were divided into two kingdoms due to the sin of King Solomon. Ten tribes became the Northern Kingdom and were collectively called Israel. The remaining two tribes made up the Southern Kingdom and were known as Judah. In a strange twist, God called this farmer from Judah to go to Israel and prophesy against them.

At first, Amos pronounced God's judgment on Israel's enemies. No one objected to that. But then he began to recite the sins of Israel. Amos first reminded them of all God had done for them. He had released them from bondage in Egypt, defeated their enemies, given them land, and raised up prophets among them. Yet Israel rebelled. It wasn't that they had completely forgotten God. They still performed their religious rituals. But while claiming to belong to God, Israel oppressed the

righteous, deprived the poor of justice, worshipped idols, and commanded the prophets not to prophesy.

Religious ritual unaccompanied by love for God and concern for the oppressed does not impress God. He despised Israel's religious hypocrisy. When He used His plumb line (standard of holiness) to evaluate Israel, her crookedness was revealed. Amos warned them that God's judgment would surely come. Their king Jeroboam would die by the sword, and Israel would be taken captive by its enemy.

In the First Reading, Amaziah, a priest of Israel who should have been open to the message of the Lord, instead commanded Amos to cease prophesying and go home. Though Amos conceded he was a farmer and not a prophet, he knew God had called him to prophesy. He would prove faithful to that call despite opposition.

First Reading:

Amos 7:12-15 NAS95 12 Then Amaziah said to Amos, "Go, you seer, flee away to the land of Judah and there eat bread and there do your prophesying! 13 "But no longer prophesy at Bethel, for it is a sanctuary of the king and a royal residence." 14 Then Amos replied to Amaziah, "I am not a prophet, nor am I the son of a prophet; for I am a herdsman and a grower of sycamore figs. 15 "But the LORD took me from following the flock and the LORD said to me, 'Go prophesy to My people Israel."

We are prophets in a sense, bringing God's message of salvation to those around us. This message is a mixture of bad news and good news. The wages of our sin is death, St. Paul tells us in Romans 6:23, and if we continue in our rebellion against God, we will surely die. That is very bad news. But the good news is in that same verse: "*…the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord*." God has called each one of us to bear this news to the whole world. Will we be faithful to the call?

Introduction to the Second Reading:

I enjoyed visiting Moody Bible Institute in Chicago when my daughter Emily was a student there. Because Moody is located near the center of one of the largest cities in America, the security on campus is tight, especially in the areas where students live and hang out. Students carry a pass card that allows them access to all the restricted areas. I was an outsider there, but as long as I was with Emily I could enjoy free access to all the college offered: I could visit the dorms, go to chapel, attend classes, eat in the cafeteria, and have coffee at Joe's Coffee Shop. Nothing was kept from me as long as I was with Emily. Without her, I would be on the outside separated from the rich experience Moody offers. I could claim no right to these blessings. But as long as I was with her, all the blessings that were hers were mine, too.

Abundant blessing and privilege exists in the spiritual realm, but in ourselves, we have no right to it. Without Christ, we are on the outside and without hope. In the Second Reading Paul tells the church in Ephesus that God's plan from the foundation of the world was to include them (and us) in these great blessings.

As you read the Second Reading, notice the richness of these spiritual blessings which can be ours in abundance. Note the words *every, all, riches, lavished, fullness.* Observe the words that indicate how intentional God was to bless us—*He chose us, He predestined us, He purposed, according to the kind intention of His will.* And notice how many times the words *in Christ* are used for it is only through Christ that we have access to His abundant blessings.

Second Reading:

Ephesians 1:3-14 NAS95 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love 5 He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. 7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace 8 which He lavished on us. In all wisdom and insight 9 He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him 10 with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him 11 also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, 12 to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory. 13 In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation–having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, 14 who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.

Can you fathom the blessings that are ours in Christ?

v. 5 adoption as sons – When we trust in Christ and His death on the cross for us, we become members of God's family with all the rights and privileges of adult sons.

v. 7 *redemption through His blood* – Redemption has the idea of buying someone from the slave market and setting them free. We were slaves to sin, but God paid the price for us by sending Jesus to die in our place. He has purchased us with His blood and set us free to serve Him.

v. 7 *the forgiveness of our trespasses* – We don't deserve forgiveness, but this is evidence of His abundant grace which He lavishes upon us.

v. 11 *an inheritance* – This is ours because in Christ we have been made a child of God.

This inheritance, St. Peter explains in 1 Peter 1:4, "is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you."

v. 13 *sealed with the Holy Spirit* –We are sealed in Christ by the Holy Spirit who comes to live in every believer. Our position in Christ is secure.

St. Paul explains the *pass card* that gives us access to God's abundant blessings:

"…after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation–having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, 14 who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory." (Ephesians 1:13-14)

We hear the message of salvation, we believe it, and are saved and sealed in Christ by the Holy Spirit. Christ's standing before God is our standing, His inheritance is our inheritance, and His riches are our riches. God lavished them on us, because we are in Christ.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

Jesus sent out the 12 disciples two by two as His representatives and under His authority. Their mission was a spiritual one. They would be taking the good news of Jesus to the lost. Naturally Satan and his demons would be opposing them at every turn, but Jesus gave his disciples power over these dark spiritual forces.

The disciples were to take nothing for their journey—no food, money, or extra clothing. Commentators have posed three reasons for what seems to us a strange command. First, extra possessions are an encumbrance. We have probably all experienced times when, instead of owning our possessions, they owned us. Our possessions require care and maintenance, consuming time and money and distracting us from more important matters of life. Are my possessions being used to serve God or are they distracting me from ministry? The disciples were to take nothing extra that could encumber them.

Second, the disciples were to go out in complete dependence on God's power and provision. One of the hallmarks of Jesus' life on earth was that He lived in complete dependence upon the Father (John 5:19, 5:30, 7:16). The disciples were to do likewise, depending on God for their daily provisions.

And third, Jesus established the principle that the minister of God is to be supported by the people to whom he ministers. It was appropriate for the disciples to enjoy the hospitality and provision of the ones who were receiving the blessings of their ministry.

If a city or household rejected the disciples and their message, the disciples were to shake the dust off the soles of their feet as they left. *Jews sometimes shook the dust off their clothing when*

*returning from Gentile lands as a sign of contempt.** When the disciples did it, it was a sign of judgment. The disciples' message of salvation was often accompanied by miracles. Rejecting the message in the face of supernatural authentication indicated an intractable heart. Those who rejected the disciples were ultimately rejecting the One who sent them. And when people reject Jesus, they are rejecting the only provision for their sin. By shaking the dust off their feet, the disciples were communicating a warning: *We offered you what you needed for salvation, but you turned it down. The responsibility for your sins remains on your shoulders. Judgment is coming. We have nothing more to offer you.*

It is a moment none of us would want to face. And we don't have to if we repent and believe.

*https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/reformation-study-bible/Matt.10.14-Matt.10.15

Gospel Reading:

Mark 6:7-13 NAS95 7 And He summoned the twelve and began to send them out in pairs, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits; 8 and He instructed them that they should take nothing for their journey, except a mere staff–no bread, no bag, no money in their belt– 9 but to wear sandals; and He added, "Do not put on two tunics." 10 And He said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave town. 11 Any place that does not receive you or listen to you, as you go out from there, shake the dust off the soles of your feet for a testimony against them." 12 They went out and preached that men should repent. 13 And they were casting out many demons and were anointing with oil many sick people and healing them.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. Which of the blessings listed in Ephesians 1 are you most thankful for and why?

2. If God were to send you out to minister, which of your possessions would be most difficult to leave behind? What could you do this week to decrease your attachment to things and increase your dependence upon God?

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/071215.cfm

First Reading AM 7:12-15

Second Reading EPH 1:3-14

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Gospel Reading MK 6:7-13

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Mass Study Notes for Sunday 7-5-2015



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

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

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First Reading

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

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

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

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

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

Second Reading

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 NAS95 7 Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this

reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me–to keep me from exalting myself! 8 Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. 9 And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. 10 Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

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

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

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

Gospel Reading

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

In this vignette we see people discrediting Jesus' ministry because of their own short sightedness and resentment. In other passages, we see people being humbled by Jesus' display of power. Here

the people of Jesus' hometown list the names of specific family members in an attempt to invalidate His miraculous signs. This would seemingly let them off the hook for being accountable to recognize the Messiah among them. The proper response to the Messiah would be to follow Him but they choose to disdain Him. As we saw in the first reading the people of Israel are a rebellious lot, obstinate, and refuse to listen even when miraculous signs are manifested in their presence. As a result of their great lack of faith Jesus' miraculous signs were withheld because God shows up when we exercise faith in Him (Hebrews 11:6).

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

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

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

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

Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass visit this web site:

http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/070515.cfm

First Reading EZ 2:2-5

Second Reading 2 COR 12:7-10

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Gospel Reading MK 6:1-6

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB