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, 3-6-2016



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **3-6-2016**. This week we open with a reading from Joshua. The successor to Moses, Joshua was one of only two of the original multitude that left Egypt who entered the Promised Land. The conquest of the land was accomplished under his leadership with victories, defeats, and noted events. The Apostle Paul's second letter to the church in Corinth is the source for the second reading. These verses reveal God's wonderful plan of reconciliation (a big theological term) in its twofold aspect: for ourselves and through us for others. The final reading from Luke's Gospel includes stories of losses, a sheep, a coin, and a wayward son. The emphasis is on what we refer to as the "Prodigal Son." From all three readings we can learn a lot about God and His loving relationship with His people.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first five books of the Bible are sometimes referred to as Law. The sixth book introduces the historical books, capturing the continuing story of Israel from their entrance into the Promised Land (under General Joshua) to their captivity and removal from the Land. In this first history book, Israel is taken into the Land, experiences ultimate victory (with significant defeats along the way), and comes into a period of rest. Chapters 1-4 detail the crossing of the Jordan River and the initial arrival in the land of Canaan. Today's reading reports on a divine encounter with God and the renewal of certain rituals.

First Reading:

Joshua 5:9-12 NAS95 9 Then the LORD said to Joshua, "Today I have rolled away the reproach of

Egypt from you." So the name of that place is called Gilgal to this day. 10 While the sons of Israel camped at Gilgal they observed the Passover on the evening of the fourteenth day of the month on the desert plains of Jericho. 11 On the day after the Passover, on that very day, they ate some of the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. 12 The manna ceased on the day after they had eaten some of the produce of the land, so that the sons of Israel no longer had manna, but they ate some of the yield of the land of Canaan during that year.

God appears to Joshua in this passage to encourage him. Having completed the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, Joshua is fully aware that only he and Caleb were among the original emigrants from Egypt. The long wilderness journey was as a result of the sin and disobedience of God's people, particularly their refusal to enter the Land when they first arrived there. What a tragedy! Literally hundreds of thousands of Israelites died on the journey. God in verse 2 seems to be telling Joshua that now the reproach of Egypt's opposition and the sin of the people were all in the past. The name "Gilgal" in the Hebrew language sounds like "roll." So their formal reproach was rolled off. This was a new, fresh start for His people.

Two startling events occur next. First, the people observe Passover. The Passover celebration is a vivid reminder of the deliverance of the people from Egypt. You can read about it in Exodus 12. God sent the death angel to kill the firstborn of the Egyptian families and their cattle. The Israelites were *passed over* if they splashed a bit of the blood of a slain lamb on the door posts and lintels of their houses. It's a magnificent illustration of the ultimate sacrifice that Jesus would make as the Lamb of God when He gave His life for the salvation of all who will by faith accept His work on their behalf and commit their lives to Him.

The second startling event occurred on the very next day. You will recall that for their entire wilderness journey, the people were provided manna (and later quail) for their daily food. It was a marvelous provision for the people, but how tedious it must have been to have the same diet day after day after day! So, here the people are finally in the Promised Land that was said to be a land of "milk and honey." On this day they were able to eat of the fruit of the land they were given. After that, the manna ceased, and from then on they could enjoy the produce of their new homeland.

How wonderful is God's provision for those who trust Him! More than mere physical food, He offers a personal relationship with Him that is made possible by the sacrifice of the Lamb of God. Trust Him!

Introduction to the Second Reading:

Paul's first letter to the Corinthians dealt with numerous problems that had arisen in the young church: disunity, sin, false teaching, to name a few. This second letter, in part, is a defense of his apostleship, for there were some who questioned his authority. He also writes to encourage the faithful and to strengthen their faith. The earlier portion of chapter 5 includes important teaching regarding the trials of life now for the Christian but the wonderful expectation for the future. Although we may struggle and ultimately die, he notes that "to be away from the body [is to be] at

home with the Lord" (v. 8). Then today's passage takes us into some deep but precious truths.

Second Reading:

2 Corinthians 5:17-21 NAS95 17 Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. 18 Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, 19 namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. 20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 21 He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Paul's statement that anyone in Christ is "a new creature" is astounding! He goes on to explain why that is true. The person who is "in Christ" is one who has confessed Jesus as lord and has by faith accepted His finished work on the cross as sufficient to cover his sin and make him right with God. Elsewhere Paul wrote, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." So, the believer is not only "in Christ," but Christ is in him. The born-again Christian (John 3:3) discovers that the things of his old life are no longer of dominant interest. Everything is seen in a new light; everything has changed.

As mentioned earlier, the next verses reveal God's wonderful plan of reconciliation (a big theological term) in its twofold aspect: for ourselves and through us for others. The term is more easily understood if we think of the frequent practice of reconciling our bank statement. The bank reports our balance is X number of dollars, but our checkbook may show a different number. We have to bring those figures into balance; that's called reconciliation. Verses 19 and 20 tell us how it has happened when we are reconciled with God. He did it through Christ. We had a debt to pay because of our sin. ("All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," Paul wrote in Romans 3:23). Jesus paid that debt by accepting the punishment due us and satisfying God's demand for justice, so that he is "not counting [our] trespasses against [us]." So, we can be reconciled with God when we accept God's gracious provision.

Paul continues to show us that, having been reconciled to God, we now have the responsibility of taking that message of reconciliation to those who have not yet been restored to God by faith. He says that message has been "committed" to us. In fact, he calls us "ambassadors for Christ." When we share God's truth with others, we are officially representing God; we are authorized and commissioned to do so. It is not a responsibility we can shirk or take lightly.

The final statement in today's reading is mind-boggling. The whole matter of reconciliation (or salvation in the broader sense) is because of the willingness of Jesus to "be sin on our behalf." It's beyond human imagination: the perfect, sinless, holy Son of God, who experienced life as we do but without sin, was willing to take our sin, bear it and its penalty for us so we can experience God's

righteousness. If you have not yet accepted this gracious gift of God, do so now and begin living as that new creature he spoke of earlier.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

Luke 15 includes three parables, all about lost things. Parables are stories with familiar images and characters that illustrate important truths—truths that are made clear by the telling of a simple story. Often, no interpretation is necessary; the application is obvious. At other times Jesus uses parables that are understood by His disciples but are not clear to hearers who are not sincerely looking for truth. Note that in this instance, Jesus is speaking to the Pharisees and scribes who were complaining that Jesus "receives sinners and eats with them." They were the audience that Jesus taught using these three stories.

Gospel Reading:

Note: Verses 4 – 10 that were omitted from the reading are included below for context.

Luke 15:1-32 NAS95 1 Now all the tax collectors and the sinners were coming near Him to listen to Him. 2 Both the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." 3 So He told them this parable, saying,

4 "What man among you, if he has a hundred sheep and has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? 5 "When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. 6 "And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!' 7 "I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. 8 "Or what woman, if she has ten silver coins and loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? 9 "When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin which I had lost!' 10 "In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

11 And He said, "A man had two sons. 12 The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.' So he divided his wealth between them. 13 "And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered his estate with loose living. 14 "Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be impoverished. 15 "So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. 16 "And he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving anything to him. 17 "But when he came to his senses, he said, 'How

many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger! 18 'I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men."' 20 "So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. 21 "And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' 22 "But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; 23 and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; 24 for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.' And they began to celebrate. 25 "Now his older son was in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 "And he summoned one of the servants and began inquiring what these things could be. 27 "And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has received him back safe and sound.' 28 "But he became angry and was not willing to go in; and his father came out and began pleading with him. 29 "But he answered and said to his father, 'Look! For so many years I have been serving you and I have never neglected a command of yours; and yet you have never given me a young goat, so that I might celebrate with my friends; 30 but when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him.' 31 "And he said to him, 'Son, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours. 32 'But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found.'"

The first parable is simple to understand. For a shepherd to lose one of his flock is disastrous. He will go to almost any length to find that single sheep. When he finds it, he rejoices and calls his friend together to rejoice with him. Jesus makes an interesting application to the story. He likens it to the rejoicing in heaven when a single sinner repents and is reconciled to God.

The second story has a very similar concluding statement: "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." In this story a woman has lost one of her ten coins, perhaps the total of all her assets. Like the shepherd, she goes on a serious search, checking every nook and cranny of her house until she finds the missing coin. She, also, calls her friends to come and celebrate the find.

One can readily conclude from these two stories that God is in the search-and-rescue business. As Peter put it, God does not want "anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). All of heaven's beings rejoice when a rescue is successful and a lost one repents and returns to God. But Jesus tells one more story, this one in great detail that emphasizes God's great love for a lost one. It is commonly referred to as the story of The Prodigal Son.

The reader is probably familiar with the story. The younger of two sons asks his father for his inheritance. He doesn't give a reason, but the succeeding events indicate that he wanted out from the confining influences of home so he could live life as he wanted to. Surprisingly, perhaps, the father gives him what he asks and does the same for his older brother who remains at home and continues his usual life working the homestead with the father. The younger son goes far from home

geographically and in every other sense, as well. He spends his inheritance in "loose living," wasting it all on his selfish desires. His dream of fun and fulfillment was burst by his wastefulness that became acute in the midst of a famine in the land he had fled to. Life became a nightmare, and he was disgraced to take a job feeding pigs (exceedingly distasteful to faithful Jews).

"When he came to his senses," he realized that the servants at his father's house had it much better than he was experiencing life, so he vowed to return home, humble himself, and beg to live as a servant. Apparently, he had come to a full appreciation of what he had lost and that it was his own sinful pride, greed, and desire for the "good life" that had brought him down to the gutter. We can't be sure about what he expected of his father. Surely, he hoped for acceptance back onto the farm as a lowly servant, but he probably would not have anticipated the response of his father to his return.

What follows is an amazing illustration of the unfathomable love and grace of God. It seems that the father had been on the lookout for his son, and he hastened to greet him, to welcome him, and to present him with multiple tokens of his love and forgiveness. And like the first two stories, a celebration follows the son's return, and there are a banquet, gifts, forgiveness, and rejoicing. Oh, but there's a catch—not everyone rejoices. Now we are re-introduced to the elder son, who, perhaps, is the real prodigal. He has been faithful in his work for the father, but apparently, his heart is not open to receive or forgive his brother. The elder brother had enjoyed his home and work, and he had his inheritance. Why should he be upset? Why couldn't he rejoice at the return of his brother? Perhaps Jesus was drawing a verbal picture of some in His audience that day. Was He thinking of the Pharisees and scribes, who like the older brother were deceived in their own self-righteousness?

The three parables clearly illustrate the value of every human being. Like the sheep, the coin, and the son, God highly values the lost ones, and he deeply loves those who have not yet repented and accepted His gracious offer to reconcile them to Himself.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. With which of the sons in the story of the prodigal son do you identify with most, the elder or the prodigal himself? Why?

2. How do you feel about the reaction of the father upon the return of his youngest son? Do you feel that the youngest go what he deserved, or what he didn't deserve? In what ways does the father's love for his son(s) emulate the characteristics that we see of God the Father in the Scriptures?

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/030616-fourth-sunday-lent.cfm

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Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Mass Study Notes for Sunday 6-21-2015



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **6-21-2015**. This week the three readings may seem to be unrelated, but a closer study helps the Christian to get a much clearer picture of who God and Jesus are—above and separated from man, their creation—and the awesome power they possess and exercise on behalf of mankind. The theologians say that God is transcendent, that is, He is way above and beyond His creation. In fact, we could know nothing about God at all, if He had not chosen to reveal Himself to mankind—through creation, through His Word, and through His Son. Jesus came to make God known in a personal way by His presence as a man among men. Immanuel, the name given Him in Matthew 1:23, means "God with us."

Job, the ancient Old Testament believer, was visited by the awesome God, and was dumbstruck. When Jesus spoke to Saul from heaven (Acts 9:3), the church's chief persecutor fell to the ground in recognition of who Jesus was. Afterwards, in his New Testament writings, then known as Paul, the Apostle shares much about the purpose of Jesus' coming and how it affects those who come to faith in Christ. The Gospels reveal the life of Jesus, who certified that He was the promised Messiah

through the demonstration of His miraculous power over the physical, natural, and spiritual constraints of life.

The first reading is from what many consider to be the oldest book in the Bible. *Note: Verses 2 – 7 which were omitted in the original reading are included here in order to provide the full context and meaning.*

The story of Job is familiar to most Christians. He was a righteous man who honored God and served his fellow men by helping in their times of distress or need. Satan approached God and wanted to test Job, claiming that he was faithful to God only because he was richly blessed in material and physical ways. God allowed Satan to test Job and the patriarch suffered the loss of crops, possessions, and his children. It's difficult to imagine the pain and suffering of this saint, and what made it worse was the counsel he received from his so-called friends. They accused him of some failure or sin that brought God's judgment upon him. He remained true, however, claiming "I know that my redeemer lives," (Job 19:25).

In the midst of his suffering, Job lamented, "If only there were someone to mediate between us, someone to bring us together" (Job 9:33). His plea is answered in the New Testament, where Paul wrote, "For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5). Little did Job understand that God's plan was to ultimately redeem lost mankind.

Today's reading presents the end of the Job's story. God appears to him and asks a series of rhetorical questions, which Job couldn't answer. Instead, he responds as anyone would in the presence of almighty God: "I am unworthy—how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth. I spoke once, but I have no answer—twice, but I will say no more" (Job 40:4-5) and "My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes (Job 42:5-6).

What should we take away from this reading? In the presence of God, we mortals are sinful and undeserving. In contrast, God is the great Creator, the almighty God who is worthy of worship. The next reading will reveal God's plan to restore sinful man to Himself.

First Reading

Job 38:1-11 NAS95 1 Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said, 2 "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? 3 Now gird up your loins like a man, And I will ask you, and you instruct Me! 4 Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding, 5 Who set its measurements? Since you know. Or who stretched the line on it? 6 On what were its bases sunk? Or who laid its cornerstone, 7 When the morning stars sang together And all the sons of God shouted for joy? 8 Or who enclosed the sea with doors When, bursting forth, it went out from the womb; 9 When I made a cloud its garment And thick darkness its swaddling band, 10 And I placed boundaries on it And set a bolt and doors, 11 And I said, 'Thus far you shall come, but no farther; And here shall your proud waves stop'?

The second reading is from one of the Apostle Paul's letter to the church in the city of Corinth. *Note: Verses 18 – 21 which were omitted from the original reading are included here in order to provide the full context and meaning.*

Paul emphasizes that Jesus died for lost mankind with the purpose that redeemed men would not live for themselves (which is the natural instinct of men), but would live for Christ. He is worthy of such commitment because He suffered humiliating death, paying the awful price for our sin, and rose from the dead as proof positive that God's demand had been paid fully.

The Apostle goes on to emphasize the significant transformation that occurs when a sinner confesses Jesus as Lord and Savior. It isn't that the convert has merely changed, but he is a new creature; he has been transformed. That's a word that describes the change that occurs when a chrysalis becomes a butterfly. Wow! It's a radical difference in nature. And because the believer has been changed, his whole life is changed. He no longer yearns for the things of his former, unconverted life. Rather, he finds everything is new, and his affections, motivations, and actions are now committed to Jesus.

What's more, the Christian now becomes an official representative of Christ on earth. Just as the sinner was reconciled to God by faith, he now is to be an ambassador for Christ, a minister of reconciliation to the lost world. God desires to use the Christian as His spokesman to share the good news of God's grace.

Paul concludes the paragraph with a startling statement about what it cost Jesus to become a satisfactory sacrifice for sin. It's hard to think of Jesus as becoming sin for us, but that's what the text says. Only by His accepting all our sin (He had none of His own) could that sin be washed away by the sacrifice of His life. As a result, by faith, we can "become the righteousness of God in Him." Praise God!

Second Reading

2 Corinthians 5:14-21 NAS95 14 For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; 15 and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf. 16 Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him in this way no longer. 17 Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. 18 Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, 19 namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. 20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 21 He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Today's final reading is from the Gospel of Mark. Jesus had been teaching the multitude, using

parables—stories that illustrate truth. Everyone likes stories, and Jesus could teach deep, spiritual realities by using familiar scenes and events. He had spoken of the sower whose seed fell on various kinds of soil with differing results. As he told His disciples, many hearers would not understand but He explained the teaching to them. On this occasion he used many parables and explained them to the Twelve (Mark 4:33).

No doubt, tired from the day of teaching (after all He was human), He instructed the disciples to go with Him to the other side of the lake. As they sailed, Jesus went to the back of the boat and slept. A terrible storm arose, and the disciples, fearing for their lives, awoke Jesus. We don't know what they intended Him to do, but He rebuked them for their lack of faith. Then, He performed a powerful miracle, ordering the wind and the sea to be calm. Immediately, the storm died down and everything became completely calm. Who could imagine that anyone could stop a storm by merely speaking to it?

Wondering among themselves, the disciples asked each other, "Who is this?" "Even the wind and the sea obey Him." As in the reading from Job and 2 Corinthians, we are faced once again with the all-powerful God. Jesus was not only 100% human, He was 100% God. He did not give up His deity when He was born on this earth. Jesus performed miracles of healing, raising the dead, casting out demons, and ordering the weather—all of which were the proof that He, indeed, was the promised Messiah who was to come to redeem His people, giving signs of His authority by the miracles He performed. When we read the Gospels, we are not merely reading exciting stories, we are being introduced to the very Creator God who sent His Son to save us.

Gospel Reading

Mark 4:35-41 NAS95 35 On that day, when evening came, He said to them, "Let us go over to the other side." 36 Leaving the crowd, they took Him along with them in the boat, just as He was; and other boats were with Him. 37 And there arose a fierce gale of wind, and the waves were breaking over the boat so much that the boat was already filling up. 38 Jesus Himself was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?" 39 And He got up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Hush, be still." And the wind died down and it became perfectly calm. 40 And He said to them, "Why are you afraid? How is it that you have no faith?" 41 They became very much afraid and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?"

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. How would you react if God were to appear to you as He did to Job? Would you be proud that He spoke to you or would you respond with reverent fear and repentance?

2. The miracle-working Jesus has paid the supreme sacrifice to reconcile you to God through faith. Have you acknowledged Him as Lord and Savior?

3. Have you accepted your role as an ambassador for Christ, trying to bring others to reconcile with

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God?

Readings for the Week

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http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/062115.cfm

First Reading JB 38:1, 8-11

Second Reading 2 COR 5:14-17

Gospel Reading MK 4:35-41

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Scripture quotations taken from the NASB