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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 11-10-2016



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we learn about how believers can be comforted through hard times as well as some insights into God's eternal kingdom he has prepared for us. The first reading is from the Apocrypha and will not be covered.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from Saint Paul's Letter to the Thessalonians. In this second Letter Paul addresses the people at Thessalonica with some important information regarding comfort during times of suffering.

Second Reading:

16 Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us eternal comfort and good hope by grace, 17 comfort and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word. 1 Finally, brethren, pray for us that the word of the Lord may spread rapidly and be glorified, just as it did also with you; 2 and that we may be delivered from perverse and evil men; for not all have faith. 3 But the Lord is faithful, and He will strengthen and protect you from the evil one. 4 And we have confidence in the Lord concerning you, that you are doing and will continue to do what we command. 5 And may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the steadfastness of Christ. (2 Thessalonians 2:16 – 3:5)

In today's reading, we see that Paul experienced suffering and prayed for the Thessalonian believers to be comforted in their affliction. I t is important to note that a biblical perspective never assumes that Christians will not suffer. The difference is that we have hope beyond this world, as Paul says, "eternal comfort" (v.16). It is God's love that provides comfort, hope and strength to keep walking in the good works that He has prepared in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:10). Instead of being sidetracked by suffering and opposition, Paul asked his fellow believers to pray for them that God would cause His Word to spread and be honored among the people who have not yet heard. Paul recognized the reality of suffering, but did not see the situation as hopeless. He turned to God for help and hope.

The question for us to consider is, "What do *we* turn to for help and hope? Some turn to alcohol to deaden the pain, or prescription drugs. Others to turn people like their spouse, children, or parents. While not all of these sources are bad, they are all finite. God is the only One big enough to take care of us. May we learn to turn to God for help and hope. Moreover, may we learn to share or need for prayer with others like Paul did so that we are not alone.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading is from Luke chapter 20 and provides some very important insights into to the nature of God's eternal kingdom. Let me provide some historical background to help you to understand Luke's message. First, although the concept may seem strange to us today, the Sadducees argument related to the Jewish legal concept known as Levirate Marriage found in Deuteronomy 25:5. "When brothers live together and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the deceased shall not be married outside the family to a strange man. Her husband's brother shall go in to her and take her to himself as wife and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her." The usefulness of Levirate Marriage in that society was something that we saw wonderfully displayed in the life of Ruth found in the Old Testament Book of the same name. Boaz, said, "Moreover, I have acquired Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of Mahlon, to be my wife in order to raise up the name of the deceased on his inheritance, so that the name of the deceased will not be cut off from his brothers or from the court of his birth place; you are witnesses today" (Ru 4:10). Levirate Marriage provided an important means of insuring the continuance of a family line. Ruth's marriage to Boaz was ***extremely*** important to God because it was through Ruth that Jesus was born! "Salmon was the father of Boaz by Rahab, Boaz was the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse" (Mt 1:5).

Second, The Sadducees were an interesting bunch of legalistic Jewish believers who held the majority power in the religious court authority called the Sanhedrin in First Century Israel. They held different beliefs than the other group called the Pharisees. The Sadducees didn't believe in the afterlife, and only held the first five Books of the Bible to be authoritative. This last thing led them to hold some unusual beliefs since they didn't have the benefit of the vast array of historical or prophetic Books in the Old Testament Bible through which to properly interpret the Jewish Law. With this background in mind let's take a deeper look at the Gospel text.

The Sadducees approached Jesus with false motives. They were not truly seeking truth from Jesus, but instead were trying to stump him. They wanted to trip Him up in this theological chess game. Looking back to the previous section Luke said about the scribes and Pharisees, "So they watched Him, and sent spies who pretended to be righteous, in order that they might catch Him in some statement, so that they could deliver Him to the rule and the authority of the governor" (Luke 20:20). This previous verse was directed at the other group known as the Pharisees, ones who *did* believe in the resurrection. In the Gospel text today Jesus addressed the particular beliefs of the other group, the Sadducees. Jesus, seeing the Sadducees motives and the faultiness of their presuppositions, treated them with dignity and grace. Yet they set up an impossible scenario for Jesus to answer based upon their belief system. Jesus explained where they were off base in their reasoning, and His points were as follows.

- Marriage is a valid paradigm for this age but not in the one to come.
- In order to receive eternal life, one must be considered worthy. How does one become worthy of life after death? He states they must be "sons of God" (v.36). How does one become a son on God? Jesus said in the Gospel of John, Chapter 20:31-32, "Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this Book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:30-31). Also, "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12-13). Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me will live even if he dies" (John 11:25).
- We will not experience death in the life to come. There we will be like angels in that we no longer will have the capacity to die. We will be eternal and in that regard, will be like God. "Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is" (1John 3:2).
- Sons of God are the sons of the resurrection. God's resurrection life lives in us, making us like Him. The Apostle Peter said, "For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust" (2 Peter 1:4).
- Jesus pointed to the Old Testament Pentateuch, which was the only piece of the Bible in which the Sadducees believed, to prove His point about the resurrection. Jesus said that since Moses used the present tense in describing the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, this proved from the Sadducees own Holy Scriptures that there is life after death on earth. Checkmate, game over!

Gospel Reading:

27 Now there came to Him some of the Sadducees (who say that there is no resurrection), 28 and they questioned Him, saying, "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that IF A MAN'S BROTHER DIES, having a wife, AND HE IS CHILDLESS, HIS BROTHER SHOULD TAKE THE WIFE AND RAISE UP

OFFSPRING TO HIS BROTHER. 29 "Now there were seven brothers; and the first took a wife, and died childless; 30 and the second 31 and the third took her; and in the same way all seven died, leaving no children. 32 "Finally the woman died also. 33 "In the resurrection therefore, which one's wife will she be? For all seven had her as wife." 34 And Jesus said to them, "The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, 35 but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage; 36 for neither can they die anymore, for they are like angels, and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection. 37 "But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the passage about the burning bush, where he calls the Lord THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, AND THE GOD OF ISAAC, AND THE GOD OF JACOB. 38 "Now He is not the God of the dead, but of the living; for all live to Him." (Luke 20:27-38 NASB)

The main point of this passage was Jesus' teaching of the truth of the resurrection, which is the central hope for Christian believers. Jesus taught His disciples that he would be resurrected, and later all of His believers have the hope that they too will one day rise from the dead with an eternal, perfect body. The Apostle Paul taught a great deal about the importance of the resurrection of Jesus. Let's take time to read what he said.

But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied. (1 Corinthians 15:13-19)

Even though the Sadducees only believed that they would go around once in life, they believed in the biblical truths from the Old Testament Pentateuch. Jesus showed them that they were responsible for their actions in this life. Jesus graciously taught them through their own Scriptures that their eternal destiny was a direct result of their choices made during their lives. They were responsible for paying careful attention to the walk with God. Jesus said, "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24). Believers are transformed through the resurrection into a "world" that is also transformed, a place where sin no longer exists and God will walk among us. As believers, we can look forward to eternal life with God through the promises made by Jesus that "we are saved by grace through faith and that not of ourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Reflection Questions

1. What is the importance of the resurrection for you? What difference does knowing the truth of the resurrection make in your day to day life as a Christian?

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2. Describe the importance of sharing your faith with nonbelievers. How does the promise of God to give you a new eternally perfect body free from pain and one in which you will be free from sin and able to stand with God in your renewed, eternal flesh, motivate you to share with others this good news?

For Further Study

Listen to Os Guinness's video message about, "If God is God then why do bad things happen?" (24 minutes, Day of Discovery TV program, RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, Michigan):

https://dod.org/programs/if-god-is-god-why-do-bad-things-happen-part-i/

For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass visit: http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings

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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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 6-5-2016

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **6-5-2016**. This week we begin with a reading from one of the Old Testament history books, 1 Kings. The passage relates the story of a miraculous healing by the prophet Elijah, who is sometimes thought of as a precursor of the Messiah Jesus. The second reading tells us how the Apostle Paul received the message He preached largely to Gentiles. It comes in the epistle that most clearly differentiates the Gospel message from Judaism. The Gospel reading once more is from Luke. The miraculous event of this episode might very well remind us of the story of Elijah in the first reading.

Introduction to the First Reading:

Anyone familiar with today's story will recall the context. In the opening verses of chapter 17, we read about the prophet Elijah moving on to the region of Zarephath where a famine was raging because of the lack of rain, which Elijah had predicted in verse 1. Here, he encountered a widow who was gathering sticks for a fire to prepare what she thought would be a last meal for her and her son. The widow followed the prophet's instructions, and the flour and oil were multiplied to provide food for the three of them.

First Reading:

1 Kings 17:17-24 NAS95 17 Now it came about after these things that the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, became sick; and his sickness was so severe that there was no breath left in him. 18 So she said to Elijah, "What do I have to do with you, O man of God? You have come to me to bring my iniquity to remembrance and to put my son to death!" 19 He said to her, "Give me your son." Then he took him from her bosom and carried him up to the upper room where he was living, and laid him on his own bed. 20 He called to the LORD and said, "O LORD my God, have You also brought calamity to the widow with whom I am staying, by causing her son to die?" 21 Then he

stretched himself upon the child three times, and called to the LORD and said, "O LORD my God, I pray You, let this child's life return to him." 22 The LORD heard the voice of Elijah, and the life of the child returned to him and he revived. 23 Elijah took the child and brought him down from the upper room into the house and gave him to his mother; and Elijah said, "See, your son is alive." 24 Then the woman said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is truth."

In today's episode, the son becomes ill and dies. The widow, forgetting the miraculous provision of food that had sustained her and the boy, blames Elijah for her son's death. Without any argumentation, Elijah takes the boy upstairs, stretches out over him, and prays. He calls upon the LORD to let the child live, and God grants his entreaty. It's a wonderful, heart-warming story, of course. And we should praise God for His answering prayer and restoring life. After all, this is not fable; it is recorded in God's Word, and it is historical reality.

We can benefit from this historical incident by understanding at least two important truths. First, God is the giver of life. As Job said, God gives and God takes away. He remains God. This miracle demonstrates once again His omnipotence and His grace. The widow's response also bears an important reminder. She said that she recognized that God's presence and power were evident in His prophet. Although, we won't likely perform life-giving- miracles as Elijah did, still we should live and speak in such a way that those who observe our life and words will recognize that we belong to God.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

In the opening verses of his letter to the church in Galatia, the Apostle Paul argues strongly against false teachers who have perverted the true gospel of Christ. His language is pretty emphatic. He says that even if angels were to teach a gospel that was different from what he taught, they should be "eternally condemned" (v. 8). He, then, proceeds to tell them about his own experience in receiving the gospel from God Himself.

Second Reading:

Galatians 1:11-19 NAS95 11 For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. 12 For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. 13 For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it; 14 and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions. 15 But when God, who had set me apart even from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, was pleased 16 to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, 17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus. 18 Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas, and stayed with him fifteen days. 19 But I did not see any other of the

apostles except James, the Lord's brother.

Paul makes it clear that what he had taught the Galatians about Jesus had not come from the teaching of other men. God's gracious provision of salvation by faith through the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus Christ was revealed to Him by God Himself. It was on the road to Damascus (the story is told three times in the Book of Acts) that Jesus appeared to Paul (then called Saul) and dramatically changed his life.

The writer indicates that his readers knew that Saul, before his conversion, had persecuted the church of God, even trying to destroy it altogether. Because of his zeal for God and Judaism, he had risen high in his religious pursuits, being even more zealous for Jewish traditions than his contemporaries. God intervened in the persecutor's life, and Paul acknowledges that God had chosen him ("set me apart") even before his birth. The Apostle makes it very clear that it was all by grace; Paul had not earned the right to know and serve Jesus. In fact, his pre-conversion life and his sinful nature (like all the rest of us) could earn only God's wrath and condemnation. But in God's mercy—not giving us what we deserve, He offers us grace—giving us what we don't deserve as a gift when we put our trust in Jesus and acknowledge Him as Lord.

Paul continues to relate something of his early experience as a believer. He didn't consult with the church leaders, but he went away for meditation and learning. It was only after three years that he went to Jerusalem where the largest number of Christians was. He became acquainted with the Apostle Peter and stayed with him for two weeks. Paul is telling his readers all of this history so they would understand that the gospel he preached did not come from the teaching of other men but by direct revelation from God.

Perhaps the most important lesson from this reading for us today is to acknowledge that the gospel message preached and written by the Apostle Paul is the continuation of the story of Jesus—His life, ministry, and provision for the salvation of those who will trust in Him.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

This significant event in the life of Jesus reminds us of the earlier reading of Elijah's restoring the widow's son to life. We must keep in mind that miracles in the Bible have great temporal benefit when they occur, but their primary purpose is to certify the prophet (or Messiah) as a bona fide messenger of God and to authenticate their message.

Gospel Reading:

Luke 7:11-17 NAS95 11 Soon afterwards He went to a city called Nain; and His disciples were going along with Him, accompanied by a large crowd. 12 Now as He approached the gate of the city, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow; and a sizeable crowd from the city was with her. 13 When the Lord saw her, He felt compassion for her, and said to her, "Do not weep." 14 And He came up and touched the coffin; and the bearers came to a halt. And He said, "Young man, I say to you, arise!" 15 The dead man sat up and began to speak. And Jesus

gave him back to his mother. 16 Fear gripped them all, and they began glorifying God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and, "God has visited His people!" 17 This report concerning Him went out all over Judea and in all the surrounding district.

The story is simple. A widow's only son has died and is being carried to his burial. Jesus demonstrates once again his compassion for the suffering, and he orders the young man to arise. Immediately, he is restored to life and begins to speak. There is a significant difference in this event from the prophet's raising of the widow's son in the Old Testament. In Elijah's case, he was alone with the boy. There were no witnesses, but, of course, the miracle happened nonetheless. In Luke's story, there were the people in the funeral procession ("a sizeable crowd") and Jesus and His disciples who were accompanied by a large crowd.

We can be sure that the mother was overjoyed at the raising of her son, but this miraculous resurrection brought fear to the crowd. Whether that was basically terror because of the extraordinary event or fright at the power demonstrated by this unusual preacher, we do not know. In any case, whether they understood fully what they were saying or not, they spoke truthfully, acknowledging that Jesus was "a great prophet." Furthermore, they confessed that "God has visited His people." The report of this event spread widely throughout the countryside. One might wonder, then, why Jesus was not more widely accepted by those who saw the miracles and heard the preaching.

Before we cast judgment upon those who did not respond in faith to what they witnessed, accepting Jesus as their promised Messiah, we must examine our own hearts. We have this story and many more recorded in the Gospels. We have the teachings of the New Testament witnesses, which, as the Apostle John wrote, "… were written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31).

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. In what ways do the miracles recorded in the Bible cause you to bow in adoration and worship before the God of the miracles?

2. Have you rejected the false teachings of men and trusted fully and only in the gospel message that Jesus paid the price for your sin and offers you the gift of eternal life by faith?

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/060516.cfm

Tenth Sunday in Ordinary Time Lectionary: 90

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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

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 4-10-2016



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **4-10-2016**. This week we will examine the readings first looking at how the apostles were energized through God's power in the Book of Acts. We will see in the Gospel reading how Jesus restored Peter's position after his denial of Him during his trial. We will also examine a reading from the Book of Revelation and give some good context to help frame the reading.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Book of Acts. The context is just after the story of Ananias and Sapphira

both of whom attempted to lie to the Holy Spirit of God and were struck dead. God used this event to reveal the necessity of purity in the early, vibrant and growing church during a time when "many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles" (Acts 5:12). These events revealed how the church was both pure and powerful, like God. Just before today's reading the apostles were gathered in an area of the Jerusalem temple called Solomon's Portico (v. 12). All of the commotion going on eventually brought the attention of the high priest, who arrested the apostles and put them into prison (vv. 17 – 18). Next, "during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out" (v. 19). At daybreak the apostles reentered the temple portico and began teaching again (v. 21). Then the high priest convened "the counsel and all the senate of Israel" (v. 21b) meaning the Sanhedrin. At this point, the officers found the apostles missing from the prison while its doors remained secured (vv. 21c – 24). During this same time the apostles remained teaching in the temple (v. 25). Next, the officers brought the apostles voluntarily to appear before the council (vv. 26 – 27) where today's reading begins.

First Reading:

Note: Verses 33 – 39 which were omitted from the reading were included below.

Acts 5:27-41 NAS95 27 When they had brought them, they stood them before the Council. The high priest questioned them, 28 saying, "We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and intend to bring this man's blood upon us." 29 But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men. 30 "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross. 31 "He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. 32 "And we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him." 33 But when they heard this, they were cut to the quick and intended to kill them. 34 But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the Law, respected by all the people, stood up in the Council and gave orders to put the men outside for a short time. 35 And he said to them, "Men of Israel, take care what you propose to do with these men. 36 "For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a group of about four hundred men joined up with him. But he was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. 37 "After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census and drew away some people after him; he too perished, and all those who followed him were scattered. 38 "So in the present case, I say to you, stay away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or action is of men, it will be overthrown; 39 but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them; or else you may even be found fighting against God." 40 They took his advice; and after calling the apostles in, they flogged them and ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and then released them. 41 So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name.

An import point that comes out in the reading is about Peter, who during Christ's arrest denied Him three times, was willing to die rather than to forsake his Lord again. This is indicative of the power

of the Holy Spirit working to energize him in his role in leading the emerging church. Later in the Gospel reading, we will see how Jesus forgave and restored Peter to his position. Peter was energized by the power given to him by God. After the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2), the apostles ministered boldly and powerfully to all who would listen. Their ministry emphasized "teaching," notice that this word appears twice in verse 28. This gives evidence to the importance of the teaching going on in the church, exactly what the Jews had earlier warned them not to do. The apostles were confronted by Rabbi Gamaliel, "a teacher of the law" (v. 34a), who was none other than the Rabbi who taught Saint Paul (Acts 22:3). This teacher possessed great wisdom, to such extent that the council accepted his profound advice (v. 40). Perhaps Gamaliel recognized the miracle that occurred when the apostles were delivered from with the locked prison. Whatever happened, after the Council accepted the Rabbi's advice even though the apostles were not charged with a crime they were still flogged in clear violation of the Jews own law. This was done because they had disobeyed the previous order from the high priest not to teach (v. 28).

What are some ways that we can apply this reading to our lives? We cannot and should not expect miracles in the same way that they happened in the early church. We should not expect to be delivered from conflicts arising either with civil or religious authorities. We can however expect to experience miracles in other ways. We can expect to see God working in miraculous ways in our lives and in the lives of those to whom we are ministering around us. We can expect miraculous answers to our prayers in ways that we may not expect. We can expect miraculous delays in God answering our prayers. How among us hasn't proclaimed, I am glad that God didn't answer that prayer right away or in the way I expected? Second, Just because a religious group grows and succeed doesn't mean that it is a movement of God. Gamaliel mentioned the cults of Theudas and Judas of Galilee from his time. There are many examples in our era including the Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses, and Islam. Any movement of God will survive at least to the extent this His purposes are accomplish through the particular movement. God's purpose through the church will not be thwarted, and He will continue building movements of His Spirit until the Lord Jesus returns. Third, we are called to obey God rather than humans. We can expect to experience cases in our life when we will need to follow the commandments of God and not the commandments of man. This may mean that we will bump up against the civil authorities when they establish laws that are clearly against both biblical absolutes and biblical principles. Finally, we must remember the urgent call of evangelism as elicited in these passages and in the closing words of our Lord to His apostles in the Great Commission. Our primary ministry should be to, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, **teaching** them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Mt 28:19-20, emphasis added).

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from the Book of Revelation. The context is after the message given in chapters 2 and 3 to the literal seven churches of Asia Minor in existence at that time. In these messages, we find many similarities to the various churches that exist in our era. The conclusion of the messages to the churches marks the beginning of the revelation to John regarding the things

which "what must take place after these things" Revelation 4e), meaning after the conclusion of the church age. John receives these messages "in the spirit" while appearing before the throne of God in heaven (Revelation 4:2). These messages continue until the end of the Book. Chapter 5 opens with the gradual unsealing of a divine "scroll," something that we can regard as being the title deed of all the earth. This title deed is gradually unfurled, and as this is done a series of judgements are revealed including seals judgements, trumpet judgements, and bowl judgements. The scroll marked with the seven seals can be thought of as the overall container for all of the judgements. The "unfurling" of the scroll by the sequential breaking of the seals reveal the seal judgments that thereafter release the trumpet and finally the bowl judgements. This symbolic expression is a handy metaphor that God used to display the pouring out of the judgements upon the world in a way that early and especially Jewish Christians immersed in the Roman society would understand. People in this society would understand how an important document like a deed would be sealed by a person in authority concerning that document and how each seal would have to be broken in order for the full content of the document to be revealed. In the case the title deed scroll is marked on both sides (Revelation 5:1) which indicates perhaps that not all of the content is secret except for the material contained behind the portion obscured by the rolled up area held in place by the seals. John was sad that nobody was worthy to open the seals on the scroll, but the "elder" revealed to him that the Lord Jesus alone was worthy, "the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David" (v. 5). Next four spiritual creatures, seemingly types of angels, along with 24 elders (likely 12 from Israel and 12 representing the church) exclaimed a victory song about Jesus and the priestly power of His believers. "And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth" (Revelation 5:9 – 10). This leads us to verse 11 with which we open today's reading.

Second Reading:

Revelation 5:11-14 NAS95 11 Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, 12 saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing." 13 And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, "To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever." 14 And the four living creatures kept saying, "Amen." And the elders fell down and worshiped.

The big idea in the reading is that the Lord Jesus, the "Lamb that was slain" (v. 11) is worthy of worship, whether it comes from angelic beings (four living creatures), or people, or every created thing (v. 13). The Scripture is clear that "EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW TO ME, AND EVERY TONGUE SHALL GIVE PRAISE TO GOD" (Romans 14:11, Isaiah 45:23). In the reading the text uses the term "myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands" (v. 11) was meant to portray the largest number that could possibly be expressed in the Greek language. The fact that God has so many creatures

worshiping Him should remind us of the fact that He is worthy of our worship! The reading said about Jesus that He is worthy "to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing" (v. 12). As a divine human, Jesus is worthy of our worship, and not just ours but all of creation. We need to keep Jesus' rightful position as the only One worthy to open the seals in the forefront of our minds as we remember our own weaknesses as well as those of the servants of the Lord throughout the Bible. Jesus came the first time as a sacrificial Lamb, which is the good news of the Gospel. However, when He returns He will be the bearer of bad news for those that don't believe. Jesus is the only One that can unveil the judgments of the seals, trumpets and bowls. Saint Paul said, "I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom" (2 Timothy 4:1).

John's vision of the exalted Lord Jesus leads us to the Gospel reading in which we will see Jesus while He was still on earth just after His resurrection.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading is from John. After Jesus' resurrection, Thomas had missed the first meeting of the apostles when they gathered in a locked room only to be surprised by Jesus' entrance. However, eight days later Jesus appeared again, at which time Thomas saw and believed. Jesus told Thomas, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed" (John 21:29). Today's reading opens with another appearance of the Lord to the apostles this time along the Sea of Galilee.

Gospel Reading:

John 21:1-19 NAS95 1 After these things Jesus manifested Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, and He manifested Himself in this way. 2 Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples were together. 3 Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will also come with you." They went out and got into the boat; and that night they caught nothing. 4 But when the day was now breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. 5 So Jesus said to them, "Children, you do not have any fish, do you?" They answered Him, "No." 6 And He said to them, "Cast the net on the right-hand side of the boat and you will find a catch." So they cast, and then they were not able to haul it in because of the great number of fish. 7 Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord." So when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put his outer garment on (for he was stripped for work), and threw himself into the sea. 8 But the other disciples came in the little boat, for they were not far from the land, but about one hundred yards away, dragging the net full of fish. 9 So when they got out on the land, they saw a charcoal fire already laid and fish placed on it, and bread. 10 Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish which you have now caught." 11 Simon Peter went up and drew the net to land, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not torn. 12 Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples ventured to question Him, "Who are You?" knowing that it was the Lord. 13 Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and the fish

likewise. 14 This is now the third time that Jesus was manifested to the disciples, after He was raised from the dead. 15 So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Tend My lambs." 16 He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Shepherd My sheep." 17 He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Tend My sheep. 18 "Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go." 19 Now this He said, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, "Follow Me!"

There are two main reasons why John includes this story in the Gospel. The smaller story is about Peter's three statements, the larger one is about John's description of who Jesus is after His resurrection from the dead. Let's unpack the smaller story about Peter first.

As you may recall, one of Peter's last encounters with Jesus before His dead was when he denied Jesus three times. Jesus had warned Peter that this was going to happen (Luke 22:34) but in spite of this Peter still failed to stand up for his friend. You can imagine that Peter felt pretty awful letting Jesus down during His time of need (Luke 22:62). Although Peter had an encounter with Jesus in the upper room in Jerusalem, the issue of his betrayal had not specifically been addressed which is why today's story is so important. In the reading, we see how Jesus asked Peter three times, "if he loved him." This corresponded to the three times in which Peter denied the Lord Jesus on the night of His betrayal by Judas Iscariot. In Jesus' kindness, He gave Peter the opportunity to publically express his loyalty to Him thereby reinstating their relationship. Interestingly, Peter and some of the other disciples had returned to their fishing career, which was then interrupted by Jesus' appearance along the shore with the purpose of appointing them to career ministry. Similarly, when Jesus first encountered Peter, He called them out of the fishing industry into becoming a fisher of men. Jesus was now reinforcing Peter's primary calling. Peter was now being called to "shepherd" (or lead) the early church. Jesus used this occasion to publically reinstate Peter back into right relationship with Him and to reestablish his leadership in ministry.

The larger reason why this Gospel story is important for the early church is that John wanted believers to know that Jesus manifested Himself as a real person multiple times after His resurrection. He did so in ways that showed both His humanity and His divinity. We see Jesus' humanity in that He was a real person that they could see (not a ghost), and He ate food with the disciples. Even after Jesus' resurrection, we see Jesus still serving His disciples by preparing them breakfast beside the Sea of Galilee. We see His divinity is the way in which He directed the disciples to cast their net on the other side of the boat and obtain a miraculous catch. On top of that, another miracle was that the net didn't break even with such a large number of fish (v. 11). We see a sign of Peter's reverence for Jesus in that he dressed himself before he jumped into the water to be with the Lord. Another expression of Jesus' divinity was His prophecy of how Peter would eventually die a

martyr's death (v. 18). You can imagine that this gave Peter some comfort and boldness in later years because he knew that Jesus had placed this mark upon his life. We saw this very clearly in the first reading in which he appeared before the council (Acts 5:27). Peter could have thought in later years something like, if I am going to die a martyrs death why be timid in my ministry? Additionally, since Peter knew that Jesus had predicted his martyrdom there is a certain amount of comfort that comes from "knowing that Jesus knows." We see in this a very intentional sense of God's sovereignty over Peter's eventual death. We too can find comfort in difficult circumstances through knowing that God is sovereign over everything that comes along.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. Jesus offers this same reinstatement to everyone who has denied the Lord. His death was the payment for the penalty that we all deserve to pay for the times in our lives in which we have denied God's ownership over our lives. What do you see in Jesus' treatment of Peter that you can apply in your own relationship with Him? List a few ways in which you tend to be like Peter and how you can receive Jesus' forgiveness as well.

2. Of what importance does the humanity and divinity of Jesus hold for believers today? Consider this in light of the following verses.

Heb 4:15 For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.

Romans 8:32-34 NAS95 32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? 33 Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; 34 who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.

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/041016.cfm

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, 2-7-2016



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **2-7-2016**. Once or twice in a lifetime God allows events to occur in the life of a person for reasons that they may not understand at the moment but later see how God used them to reveal their pride and sinfulness and need for salvation through faith in Jesus. Some time ago one of those things happened to me. Back in the day I was an engineer at one of the Big Three automotive companies. I wore a suit and tie to work each day and had a pass to access the test track across the street. I drove a brand new truck and in my mind I guess I kind of saw myself as important in the overall scheme of things in the automotive world. One day as I was getting dressed I examined the pattern of stitching on my underwear and how the tag was placed on the opposite side of the seams and overlapping seams that joined the panels together. As an engineer I thought, isn't that strange how they placed the tag on the wrong side so that it faced out when the seams were faced in? Then it hit me, I had, for my entire life mind you, worn my underwear inside out with the tag facing out and the finished seams facing in (which even today still seems very logical to me!). I thought that I was such an important engineer and yet I had worn my underwear backwards during my entire career. As my grandma would have said, good thing I didn't have an accident. Pride gets the best of us, but God has His ways of revealing our pride in order to help us to be released to worship Him.

This week we open with a reading from the Prophet Isaiah in which we learn about our need for cleansing from our sin as well as a vision of God on His throne. Then we move to the second reading from the next to last chapter of Saint Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians where we learn about how he corrected an important misunderstanding regarding the crucially important doctrine of the

resurrection. Then we close with the Gospel lesson from Saint Luke in which we see how Jesus performed a great miracle among a group of common fishermen in order to gather His own catch of men. We are going to see today how when God places a unique calling upon a person such as a prophet or disciple of Christ he often brings those people to the point of understanding their sinfulness and need for a Savior. A. W. Tozer said, "It is doubtful whether God can bless a man greatly until He has hurt him deeply." Such is the case that we will see today when we encounter two men whom God deeply convicted of their sins. As we study you may wish to check the direction in which your underwear is facing.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Prophet Isaiah, chapter 6. The context of the reading is just after the pronouncement of woes upon the people of Israel for their sin in the previous chapter. His messages follow the pattern "Woe to those who." "Therefore," Isaiah said, "My people go into exile for their lack of knowledge" (Isaiah 5:13b). Isaiah continued his song of woes saying, "Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; Who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!" (Isaiah 5:20). The prophet's words are eerily reminiscent of Saint Paul's warnings about what was to come upon the world in the last days, a period that began the moment Jesus Christ ascended into heaven. Paul said, "But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these" (2 Timothy 3:1-5). Isaiah's pronouncement of woes serves as a warning to all generations about the deceitfulness and danger of sin. We shouldn't be surprised by events happening in Isaiah's day as if the Israelites were somehow worse sinners than the people of our own age.

From this context we begin the readings. You'll see a huge contrast between the wickedness of people and the holiness of God.

First Reading:

Isaiah 6:1-8 NAS95 1 In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. 2 Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. 3 And one called out to another and said, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory." 4 And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke. 5 Then I said, "Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts." 6 Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a burning coal in his hand, which he had taken from the altar with tongs. 7 He touched my mouth with it and said, "Behold, this has touched your lips; and your iniquity is taken away and your sin is forgiven." 8 Then I heard the voice

of the Lord, saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Then I said, "Here am I. Send me!"

The first insight that jumps out of the reading requires some careful insight into the background of King Uzziah mentioned in the first verse. Isaiah provides the date of his vision as "In the year of King Uzziah's death" (v. 1a), meaning sometime after the date of King Uzziah as recorded in 2 Chronicles 26:23. King Uzziah was one of the good kings of Judah, although sometime during the end of his reign pride got the better of him when he attempted to usurp the function of a priest by burning incense to the Lord (2 Chronicles 26:16). Afterwards, because of his pride God inflicted him with leprosy that likely hastened his death. Isaiah is clearly using this mention of Uzziah's death as a warning about the danger of pride because as he continues in the reading he shows how God convicted him of his own pride. Upon seeing some miniscule portion of the glory of the Lord, Isaiah was deeply convicted of his sinful nature and said, "Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips" (v. 5). Pride is something that anyone exposed to direct revelation from God would most likely struggle with. Their vision and special role left them vulnerable to the assumption that they were superior. Add to this the fact that once the prophets began to experience God's message they would have been called to live much holier lives than the surrounding people did. Even Saint Paul wasn't immune from pride because we know that God inflicted him with a "thorn in the flesh." Paul said, "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!" (2 Corinthians 12:7). Isaiah was no different and as we see in the reading he required conviction of his sin and subsequent forgiveness (v. 7). The ministry of forgiveness was delivery by none other than the seraphim, a special type of angel who use two of their wings to cover their face (v. 2). Interestingly, although the angels cover their faces, Isaiah is allowed to see the glory of God. God allows this for the purpose of revealing Isaiah's uncleanness and compelling need for forgiveness. We see through the reading that forgiveness came from the altar of God, as only God can forgive sin.

Sometimes as I'm reading the Bible as I study the text and the related passages I come to an "aha moment." During my study for this reading, I had one of those moments as I remembered how Saint John had said something about Isaiah. When we read the Gospels, we need to take careful notice when either the writers or Jesus Himself quotes from the Bible (what we now call the Old Testament). In this case, Saint John clearly indicated that Jesus was the Person on the throne about whom Isaiah spoke. As proof, first, we know that no one can see God in His fullness and live (Exodus 33:20). However, Scripture says that the prophets saw varying manifestations of God, as Saint John made clear in the following verse:

39 For this reason they could not believe, for Isaiah said again, 40 "HE HAS BLINDED THEIR EYES AND HE HARDENED THEIR HEART, SO THAT THEY WOULD NOT SEE WITH THEIR EYES AND PERCEIVE WITH THEIR HEART, AND BE CONVERTED AND I HEAL THEM." 41 These things Isaiah said **because he saw His glor**y, and he spoke of Him. (John 12:39 -41, emphasis added, note that the capital letters indicate quotations from the Old Testament.)

Had we read past verse 8 in Isaiah where today's reading ended we would have seen these verses:

Isaiah 6:9-10 NAS95 9 He said, "Go, and tell this people: 'Keep on listening, but do not perceive; Keep on looking, but do not understand.' 10 "Render the hearts of this people insensitive, Their ears dull, And their eyes dim, Otherwise they might see with their eyes, Hear with their ears, Understand with their hearts, And return and be healed."

Do you see the correlation between John's writing in the Gospel and the verses he quoted from the Old Testament in Isaiah? Aha, what John was saying was that it was **Jesus'** glory that Isaiah was seeing, the glory of God on His throne!

For additional evidence that the One that Isaiah saw high and lifted up on the throne was Jesus, Isaiah used the same language about this Person in today's reading as compared to his writings about the coming Messiah in the Servant Songs later in chapters 52 – 53. Isaiah spoke of the Lord "sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted" (v. 1). Later in the Servant Songs Isaiah said about the coming Servant Messiah Jesus: "Behold, My servant will prosper, He will be high and lifted up and greatly exalted" (Isaiah 52:13). What Saint John was explaining by drawing from Isaiah was that Jesus is God spoken of in the Old Testament. Jesus said. "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:9).

We can celebrate the ways in which Jesus revealed His glory to the world in both the Old and New Testaments. We can have confidence that even though Isaiah may not have completely understood his visions and writings he faithfully recorded them in the Scriptures such that some seven hundred years later Jesus could come along and fulfill them. In the same way, we can trust that when we read the prophetic verses in the **New** Testament, they too will be fulfilled in exquisite detail in ways that we cannot totally understand. In spite of the fact that we don't have a perfect understanding of how things will play out, we can trust that God has enlightened our understanding to the extent necessary for us to accomplish the work that He has for us to accomplish.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from the next to last chapter of First Corinthians and contains an early creedal statement in the first half dozen verses. Paul had just finished his instruction on the necessity of order in worship, so it's appropriate that this section opens with the statement of one of the earliest creeds of the church.

Second Reading:

1 Corinthians 15:1-11 NAS95 1 Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, 2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. 3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6 After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; 7 then He

appeared to James, then to all the apostles; 8 and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also. 9 For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me. 11 Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

One of the problems in the Corinthian church was that some of them didn't believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is made clear by the verses immediately following today's reading:

1 Corinthians 15:12-19 NAS95 12 Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; 14 and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. 15 Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. 16 For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; 17 and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. 19 If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.

This context is extremely important in understanding Paul's purpose in including such deep creedal statements before he addresses the Corinthian's unbelief. You may have heard how those in the government have taught that the best way to spot a counterfeit bill is not to study the counterfeits, but instead to become intimately familiar first with genuine articles. This is exactly what Paul did by leading with the truth and then addressing the Corinthian's unbelief as a means of providing a bridge to those confused about the resurrection of Christ. Paul taught many deep spiritual truths in the first seven verses including things that we, as believers, take for granted with our more extensive understanding of faith and more extensive creeds such as the one recited each week during Sunday Mass. Paul taught:

- People are saved by receiving, standing and holding fast to the Gospel (v. 1).
- Christ died for our sins, that this was in fulfillment of the Scriptures, and that He was buried and raised on the third day again as predicted by the Bible (v. 3). This provided confirmation of the truthfulness of the Old Testament prophecies concerning Jesus.
- The resurrected Jesus appeared to more than five hundred believers, some of whom were still alive at the time of his writing (v. 6). This was important because as live witnesses they would have been able to challenge these writings about the resurrection of Jesus.

The reading also relates to what we learned about Isaiah in the first reading in terms of the necessity of prophets to have a humble heart. He said that he was the "least of the apostles," one whom had persecuted the church (v. 9), yet labored harder than all the others because the grace of God was with him (v. 10). Yet as an apostle of Christ he had a unique calling in that when he was formerly a persecutor of the church (v. 9) the resurrected Lord appeared to him. Finally, he exclaimed that regardless of who preached the good news, the end result was that the people

believed (v. 11). He said something very similar to this in Philippians:

Philippians 1:15-18 NAS95 15 Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will; 16 the latter do it out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel; 17 the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment. 18 What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice,

We see in this reading Saint Paul's heart for ministry. We saw how he provided the Corinthians with both truth and evidence of the truth, an "apologetic." The defense of the truth is very important in our day with a culture that denies the existence of absolute truth, yet does so absolutely. Although there is plenty of room for discussion and even error on various Christian doctrines, the resurrection is one of the central, defining doctrines of our Christian faith. We saw this in Paul's own words. "If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied" (1 Corinthians 15:19).

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

As we transition to the Gospel lesson we will return to a very similar theme that we saw in the first reading from Isaiah. Here we will see the calling of the disciples of Christ and how the Holy Spirit convicted Peter of his sinfulness and need for a Savior.

Gospel Reading:

Luke 5:1-11 NAS95 1 Now it happened that while the crowd was pressing around Him and listening to the word of God, He was standing by the lake of Gennesaret; 2 and He saw two boats lying at the edge of the lake; but the fishermen had gotten out of them and were washing their nets. 3 And He got into one of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little way from the land. And He sat down and began teaching the people from the boat. 4 When He had finished speaking, He said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." 5 Simon answered and said, "Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing, but I will do as You say and let down the nets. 6 When they had done this, they enclosed a great quantity of fish, and their nets began to break; 7 so they signaled to their partners in the other boat for them to come and help them. And they came and filled both of the boats, so that they began to sink. 8 But when Simon Peter saw that, he fell down at Jesus' feet, saying, "Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" 9 For amazement had seized him and all his companions because of the catch of fish which they had taken; 10 and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not fear, from now on you will be catching men." 11 When they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed Him.

In the reading we see the occurrence of several miracles. We see the Lord's miracle of gathering the fish into the particular spot in which to be caught (v.4). Next we see how Simon Peter followed Jesus' instruction (vv. 5-6), a miracle in itself. Then we see the miracle of the gigantic catch (v. 6). However, perhaps the greatest miracle of all was how God enlightened Simon Peter's heart to reveal his sinfulness and frail humanity (v. 8). Yet another miracle was how this group of disciples (Peter,

James, and John) were willing to forsake their livelihood and instead become "fishers of men" (v. 10). All of these miracles are significant in that they helped bring about the specific calling to a discrete small group of disciples eventually numbering just twelve select people, each with unique skills and gift mix.

One of the significant things in the reading concerns how God requires humility in His servants. Just like we saw how Isaiah responded to seeing the glory of Jesus on His throne, Saint Peter responded in a very similar way when he experienced the miraculous catch of fish. Any sport fisherman who has ever endured a slow fishing season may understand that even a nominal catch is a miracle. However, in the case of the Peter, James and John these were professional fishermen who made their living at fishing. Peter's reaction indicated that there was much more going on than just the miraculous catch, God was working in his heart to convict him of his sinfulness as well as using the miracle to prove that Jesus was able to fulfil His words.

What are some ways that we can apply what we have learned today? In the first reading we saw how God exposed Isaiah's sinfulness and need for cleansing from his sin. In the Gospel lesson we saw how Saint Peter was convicted of his sinfulness and need for a Savior. In our lives we must be aware of our own pride and our need for God's forgiveness, "for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). God in His grace brings to mind our sinfulness so that we may repent of our sin and be healed (see Acts 3:19). Without God Himself bearing the penalty for **our** sin the ultimate end for us is death (Romans 6:23). He did this for us through His grace while we were hopelessly trapped in our sin with no hope of escape. Paul said, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Our receipt of the free gift of forgiveness comes through our faith in the Lord Jesus and not any of our perceived good works (Ephesians 2:8-9). Saint Paul said that we need to receive this gift:

"9 that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; 10 for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. 11 For the Scripture says, "WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED." 12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; 13 for 'WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED'" (Romans 10:9-13).

God tells us not to take this for granted, but rather to test ourselves. "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you–unless, of course, you fail the test?" (2 Corinthians 13:5). The stakes are very high, each of us should examine our hearts and see whether we are trusting only in the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross for us, because in terms of earning our salvation God said through Isaiah, "Our righteous deeds are as filthy rags before the Lord" (Proverbs 14:12). Let us take to heart the Gospel message: "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). It is not enough to just know the Gospel, we must respond to message and live in light of this good news.

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Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. In the second reading Saint Paul provide several proofs regarding the resurrection. A. How do these proofs provide you with comfort today?

2. Why is the resurrection of **our** bodies important to you and how can this doctrine help you in light of the things with which you are suffering?

3. What areas of pride has God revealed to you? How has He used these times of "breaking" to usher you into new places of trust and intimacy with Him?

Readings for the Week

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http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/020716.cfm

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Mass Study Notes for Easter Sunday 4-5-2015

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



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for Easter Sunday, **4-5-2015**. On this joyful day of celebration, we remember how God raised His Son, our Savior, Jesus from the dead. Through Jesus' death and resurrection, we have eternal life through faith in His finished work on the cross. Accordingly, this week's readings answer some of the most important questions that humans have ever asked about eternal life. The first reading is a message from Saint Peter that explains the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection that has been provided for all humankind. The second reading from Saint Paul's Letter to the Colossians provides the implications of what believing in Jesus looks like in the life of the believer. Finally, we conclude with the glorious story of Jesus' resurrection from the Gospel of Saint John.

Throughout my earlier years, our family always held a special celebration of Jesus' resurrection on this important day of Easter Sunday. Our festivities included a delicious dinner with special people including my grandmothers, grandmas, aunts, uncles, and of course my brothers and sisters. Back then, I understood that Jesus' resurrection from the dead was very important. As I grew into adulthood, I came to a much fuller understanding of the meaning of Easter Sunday and I am learning how to live in the reality of Jesus' resurrection for every day of my life. My prayer is that through this study you, too, will come to a deeper appreciation of what Jesus did for us and live in His resurrection power all throughout the days ahead.

First Reading:

The first reading this week is from the Acts of the Apostles, Chapter 10. The context of this section is Saint Peter's address to Cornelius, the gentile Centurion from Caesarea. A Centurion was a roman military leader who led 100 men. The story of what we are about to read happened a few days after Peter had seen a vision of a huge sheet lowered to the ground containing a variety of animals,

including ones that the Jews were forbidden from eating according to the Old Testament Law. God revealed to Peter that he was no longer bound by these dietary food laws, and by extrapolation, that the proclamation of the Gospel was being opened to the Gentiles. God told Peter, "What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy" (Acts 10:15b-ff). At the same time that Peter had his vision of accepting Gentiles, Cornelius, a God-fearing Gentile, had a vision in which an angel of God spoke to him about salvation. He sent messengers to Peter in Joppa with orders to bring him to his home in Caesarea. Because Peter had been convinced in this vision about associating with Gentiles, he agreed to travel to Cornelius' home. When Peter arrived Cornelius fell at his feet and worshiped him, but Peter stopped him. Peter then said, "Stand up; I too am a man" (v. 26). He addressed the crowd that Cornelius had gathered by saying, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him; and yet God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean" (v. 28). Then Cornelius explained that he had seen a vision of an angel who told him to send for Simon Peter at the home of one Simon the tanner who lived by the sea (v. 32). It was at this point that we join Peter's address to Cornelius along with his relatives and close friends (Acts 10:24).

Now let's read the text, noting that some of the omitted verses were included in order to provide the full context.

Acts 10:34-43 NAS95 34 Opening his mouth, Peter said: "I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, 35 but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him. 36 The word which He sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all) — 37 you yourselves know the thing which took place throughout all Judea, starting from Galilee, after the baptism which John proclaimed. 38 You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. 39 We are witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross. 40 God raised Him up on the third day and granted that He become visible, 41 not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, that is, to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. 42 And He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead. 43 Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins."

Peter said quite an earful; his message encapsulated almost the entirety of the Gospel. He told the gentile Cornelius and his family the Good News regarding the forgiveness of sins offered to anyone who believes, Jew or Gentile alike (v. 34), through faith in Jesus Christ (v. 43). Peter, fresh from his vision of the animals coming down in the large sheet, affirmed that God was no respecter of persons; this salvation was available to everyone (vv.34 – 35). Peter provided a high-level narrative to Cornelius of his personal, eyewitness testimony concerning the events about Jesus Christ. He said that Jesus:

- Was anointed by God with power (v.38),

- Ministered to the people by healing and opposing the devil (v.39),
- Was crucified by the Jews in Jerusalem (v.39b),
- Was raised by God on the third day (v.40),
- Was made visible to select witnesses after His resurrection (v.41), and
- Provided the disciples with specific instructions regarding preaching the truth about Jesus being the divinely appointed Judge of the living and the dead (v.42).

Peter confirmed that Jesus was the fulfillment of the testimony given by all of the Old Testament prophets. Finally, Peter announced the best news of all, that **anyone** who believes in Jesus receives forgiveness of their sins (v.43). What, though, does "believing in Jesus" mean? For many believe that Jesus existed or that He was a good teacher. When the Bible talks about believing in Jesus, it means having a personal, experiential trust that we put in Jesus for our salvation. We all know that we have done evil things and thought wrongly about people. These wrong behaviors and mindsets are what the Bible calls sin. Because of our choices to sin, we each have a debt that we owe to the Holy God, our Creator who designed us for Himself. By sinning, we basically declared cosmic treason. This sin debt will need to be paid. The question is, who will pay? We have two payment options: 1. an eternity in hell, or 2. belief in Jesus' payment for our sin. All of the best deeds in the world do not cancel out our sin debt. The Bible is very clear about this, for it says, "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). Death, meaning eternal separation from God, is the payment for sin. And that is why Jesus' death on the cross is so important. Here is where He made the payment for my sin and your sin. This payment is offered to us as a free gift of eternal life. Therefore, belief in Jesus is accepting this gift of Jesus' payment for your sin debt and trusting in Him for eternal life. This is why the celebration of Easter (Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday) is such a glorious memorial in the Christian church.

Second Reading:

Understanding Peter's testimony in the first reading that anyone who believes in Jesus receives the forgiveness of their sins, provides a convenient gateway to the second reading where we see that humans cannot attain to God through their own efforts. This reading is from Saint Paul's Letter to the Colossians, chapter 3. This Book is one of the biblical books known as the "Prison Epistles" named because Paul wrote them while he was in prison in Rome. The reading today opens with the word "therefore" in verse one. Any time we see that word (as you may have noted in previous editions of Mass Notes) we have to ask, "What is it the 'therefore' there for?" The "therefore" in 3:1 refers to what Paul said in the previous chapters. In order to give the passage more context, we will explore this in much further detail below.

Stepping back to look at the big picture, Paul's overall purpose in the Epistle was to correct heresy that was being taught in the church. The heresy had four elements that Paul addressed in chapter 2. These false beliefs included the denial of the sufficiency and preeminence of Jesus Christ (2:8), the exaltation of Jewish ritualism (2:11, 16-17), the teaching of the extreme denial of the flesh as a way of getting closer to God (known as "asceticism," 2:20-23), and the ungodly practice of worshiping angels (2:18). All four teachings clearly contradict the Scriptures. Paul corrected their

misunderstandings early in the second chapter by making some clear statements to help them stand in the midst of false teaching. Paul said, "See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form" (Colossians 2:8-9). This statement addressed elements of all four of the heresies that were being taught and practiced by certain members of the church.

With this context in mind, let's read from Saint Paul's Letter, the second reading in the Mass today. As you read, keep in mind the sufficiency that we as believers have through faith in Jesus Christ.

Colossians 3:1-4 NAS95 1 Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. 3 For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.

Paul said, "if you have been raised up with Christ. This has a threefold meaning. First, he meant this in the sense that **if** we have believed in Jesus' death and resurrection, then we are in a sense crucified with Him and therefore "raised up" on the cross with Him. Paul said in Galatians, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me" (Galatians 2:20). Second, we have been "raised up" in the sense that, if we believe, we have been "born from above." This is something that Jesus tried to explain to Nicodemus (John 3:3), the man who evidently did later come to believe in Jesus since he came to help prepare Jesus' body for burial after He was crucified (John 19:39). Jesus used a Greek word "anothen" which had a dual meaning, above and again. Jesus taught Nicodemus that he had to born from above spiritually, and that he had to be born a second time spiritually in a process distinct from his physical birth. The instant a person "believes" they are "born from above," meaning that they received the gift of eternal life and the Holy Spirit of God now lives inside of them. The third meaning that Paul had in mind regarding being "raised up" with Christ is that in a spiritual sense after we die we will be "raised up" to a much greater authority in order to reign with Jesus Christ. Paul said, "If we endure, we will also reign with Him; If we deny Him, He also will deny us" (2 Timothy 2:12).

Here is another important insight from the reading. Paul said in verse 4, "When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory." Notice the repetition of the word "revealed." We spoke about one aspect of Christ's revelation last week in the Palm Sunday readings when we discussed His triumphal entry to Jerusalem. However, in this reading Paul wasn't referring to Christ's exaltation as King when he rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. Rather, he was referring to Jesus' Second Coming at which time He will return in glory to judge the world. As we said last week, Jesus came the first time as a humble, unblemished Lamb (Revelation 13:8). However, Jesus will return the second time as the glorious Lion of the Tribe of Judah (Revelation 5:5). He will return as the Almighty Warrior on a white horse, not a donkey (Revelation 19:11). Jesus **was revealed** as the King of the Jews when he entered Jerusalem on a donkey. He **was revealed** as the King of the universe when he rose from the dead, this is what we are celebrating today. Finally, Jesus will be

revealed when He comes again in glory with all of His believers in tow, that is us, His saints (Revelation 19:14, 1 Corinthians 1:2, Acts 9:13, Acts 9:32, Acts 26:10, Romans 16:2).

As we conclude the second reading and discussion, it may be helpful to rephrase the flow of thought before the first few verses. After the three verses of the reading, a capstone statement provides my personal summary of the reason why we must set our minds on things above:

Keep in mind the correction given to us regarding the false teaching that depends on self-effort, and realize we **have been** crucified with Christ, we **have been** born from above, and we **will be** exalted to participate in reigning with Jesus Christ. Since God **has** granted us all of these incalculable gifts, **THEN** let us "*Set [our] minds on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. 3 For [we] have died and [our lives are] hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then [we] also will be revealed with Him in glory*" (vv. 2-4). We are called by God to do the latter (vv. 2-4) because the teachers of the theological heresies were attempting to bring Jesus down to their level by falsely thinking they could reach up to heaven by practicing manmade religion.

I hope that this illustrates the importance of reading the context of the verses from the reading. The big idea is that humans cannot attain fellowship with God in heaven through religious rituals, ascetic practices (like starving the body), or the worship of angels (see Luke 4:8, Matthew 4:10, and especially Revelation 22:8-9 where the practice is expressly forbidden). The only way that humans can attain eternal life and fellowship with God is through faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, believing that Jesus atoned for our sin (Romans 10:9-13).

Alternative Second Reading:

This week's readings included an alternative to the second reading. This optional passage was from Saint Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. The context is Paul's confrontation of a certain church member who was having an immoral relationship with his stepmother. In verse one of this chapter he said, "It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife" (1 Corinthians 5:1). Paul was upset with the church because rather than disciplining the one that was involved with this sin, the church acted as if this was an acceptable practice for a believer in Jesus. The Corinthian church failed to exercise these proper steps of church discipline that could have eventually led to the restoration of the man that was trapped in this sexual sin. This would have included first calling the person to repentance and separating him from the church. Paul's confrontation is strong, but it is based in the power of the Gospel, Jesus' sacrifice for sin.

1 Corinthians 5:6-8 NAS95 6 Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? 7 Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. 8 Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

The root of the issue was that this young church was flaunting the freedom that they had in Christ. Paul explains this by using imagery drawn from the Old Testament Feast of Passover. In verse 6 Paul referred to the Jewish religious practice of purifying their home from yeast (leaven) during the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Exodus 12:15). Every Jewish home would have to get rid of yeast and bake unleavened bread during this season. He uses this imagery to provide a metaphor for the purity that God requires in the church. Paul's point was that the "leaven" of the man's sin permeated throughout the church, in the same way yeast permeates dough (v. 6). It was bad enough the church tolerated this sin amongst them, but they even boasted about it (v. 6).

As we celebrate Jesus' resurrection today on Easter Sunday, this passage helps us to recognize God's calling to live holy and pure lives. This is especially true in our culture that is filled with temptations to be drawn into sexual sins, something with which the ancient Corinthians also struggled. Today we can celebrate that Jesus fulfilled once and for all the repetitive, annual practice among the Old Testament Jews to sacrifice their Passover lamb (Hebrews 10:10). We can turn to the victorious One in prayer to deliver us from our temptations (Matthew 6:13), even difficult things such as sexual sin. Jesus calls us to "confess our sins one to another" (James 5:16) meaning that we can turn to a fellow Christian to ask for their intercessory prayer on our behalf when we encounter struggles that we are unable to overcome through our own prayer and obedience. Paul calls believers to celebrate the feast with sincerity and truth before God and our community. What better day to contemplate making some serious changes in our life than on Easter Sunday?

Gospel Reading:

As we move onto the Gospel reading from Saint John Chapter 20 we will see the "reason for the season" of Easter. Throughout the Lenten period, we have looked forward to the celebration of this glorious day. Before you read, say a short prayer asking God to show you what the resurrection means for your life.

John 20:1-9 NAS95 1 Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came early to the tomb, while it was still dark, and saw the stone already taken away from the tomb. 2 So she ran and came to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him." 3 So Peter and the other disciple went forth, and they were going to the tomb. 4 The two were running together; and the other disciple ran ahead faster than Peter and came to the tomb first; 5 and stooping and looking in, he saw the linen wrappings lying there; but he did not go in. 6 And so Simon Peter also came, following him, and entered the tomb; and he saw the linen wrappings lying there, 7 and the face-cloth which had been on His head, not lying with the linen wrappings, but rolled up in a place by itself. 8 So the other disciple who had first come to the tomb then also entered, and he saw and believed. 9 For as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead.

The narrative continues beyond what was covered in the reading:

10 So the disciples went away again to their own homes. 11 But Mary was standing outside the tomb

weeping; and so, as she wept, she stooped and looked into the tomb; 12 and she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had been lying. 13 And they said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him." 14 When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus. 15 Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" Supposing Him to be the gardener, she said to Him, "Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away." 16 Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to Him in Hebrew, "Rabboni!" (which means, Teacher). (John 20:10-16)

Can you imagine being one of the disciples who watched Jesus die on the cross? Then all of a sudden news reaches you that Jesus' body is not in the tomb. You run to the tomb on Sunday and realize it is empty. What are the options? Maybe someone had taken the body or maybe Jesus' prediction that he would rise again really did come true. It would have been confusing, mind-blowing and extremely scary, for those who sought to kill Jesus were still feeling emboldened to snuff out any memory of Jesus.

Mary Magdalene believed and was the first person to see the risen Lord alive. She received confirmation that since God raised Jesus from the dead, she would one day be raised herself.

We can also have assurance of salvation which leads to eternal life by trusting in what the Scripture says about how a person does make it to heaven when they die. The first reading brought up the idea of "belief in Jesus." Let's recap what this means, for this is the foundation of our faith. First, God says that all of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). God says that because of our sin the payment we will receive without some outside intervention is death, meaning eternal separation from God (Romans 6:23). In that same verse, God says that the outside intervention has been given as a free gift: Jesus died on the cross for the payment of our sins. This good news can also be found in the famous verse that is often seen printed on cardboard signs held up at sporting events. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Saint Paul said, "If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9).

Does this sound like something that is simple to achieve? It is simple, but if it's not necessarily easy. If it were easy then everyone in the world that ever heard the Gospel would become a believer. Peter said in Acts 2:38 that belief is intricately tied to repentance. When we believe in Jesus, it is because we are convicted of our need for a Savior. This leads us to repent of (or turn away from) our sins. This means that we have come to agree with God about our sins, and recognize them for what they are, deadly (Romans 6:21). The Bible says that even one single sin would keep us from entering heaven – forever (James 2:10). So repentance of sin, turning away from the destructive forces that once ruled our lives, is an on-going part of exercising faith in Jesus. One preacher said, "If your faith hasn't changed you, it probably hasn't saved you." This is not to imply that works are necessary for salvation. But it is to say that true faith is manifested in our lives being oriented around the values

that Christ had, because He is our life (Colossians 3:4). Jesus' death and resurrection were given as a gift to all, to cover our sin and provide us with the right to be accepted into heaven. As we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus on Easter Sunday, keep in mind the simplicity of this Gospel message that Jesus gave to the world.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. We covered a great deal of ground today in our study. The main point that we ask you to consider in light of your study is, what difference does the resurrection of Jesus Christ make in **your** life? Contemplate this question in light of the following contexts.

A. What difference does Jesus' resurrection make as I move about in many relational networks where I rub shoulders with people who don't all believe that faith in Jesus is the only pathway to God? How does my life reflect the power of Jesus' resurrection and become an apologetic for His life-transforming presence?

B. What difference does Jesus make if you find yourself in an unhappy situation this Easter? How does the knowledge that Jesus rose from the dead give you hope through these difficulties?

2. Perhaps you don't completely understand the meaning of Jesus in your life. Have you received the forgiveness of your sins through the only method possible: faith in Jesus' sacrificial death and resurrection from the dead? Do you want to be with God and know that you will make it to heaven when you die? Let's pray to affirm or reaffirm our belief in Jesus this Easter.

Dear God, I recognize that I am a sinner, and that because of my sin I deserve death and eternal separation from You. I believe that Jesus died for my sins as payment of the penalty I owed. I believe that You raised Him from the dead and that He will come again in glory. I want to have this gift of eternal life that the Bible talks about through faith in Christ. I repent of my sins and ask You, in the name of Jesus, to empower me to set my sights on spiritual things above, not on earthly desires that have separated me from You. I pray this in Jesus' Holy name, Amen.

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/040515.cfm

First Reading ACTS 10:34A, 37-43

Second Reading COL 3:1-4 or 1 COR 5:6B-8

Gospel Reading JN 20:1-9

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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 5-4-2014



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for 5-4-2014. This week, as we did last week, we will open with the Gospel reading. Then we will move onto the first reading from the Book of Acts and then close with the continuing study from First Peter.

The Gospel reading is from Chapter 24 of Saint Luke, which recounts the story of two men who met the risen Lord Jesus on the road to Emmaus, a city located seven miles northwest of Jerusalem. The context of the reading is just hours after Mary Magdalene reported the news to the disciples that Jesus had risen from the dead. A lot happened in the early hours of that first Easter morning. Mark and Matthew tell us that Jesus first appeared to Mary Magdalene (Mark 16:9, Matthew 28:9). According to Saint Paul, Jesus appeared to Peter at some point after Mary (1 Corinthians 15:5), and before the meeting with the eleven disciples, the timing of this appearance to Peter isn't known. The next appearance was to the men we will read about in Luke's account below. Not much is known about the exact identity of the two men. One of them is named Cleopas, about whom there is a tradition that he was the brother of Joseph, the husband of Jesus' mother Mary. The other person wasn't named.

> *13 And behold, two of them were going that very day to a village named Emmaus, which was about seven miles from Jerusalem. 14 And they were talking with each other about all these things which had taken place. 15 While they were talking and discussing, Jesus Himself*

> *approached and began traveling with them. 16 But their eyes were prevented from recognizing Him. 17 And He said to them, "What are these words that you are exchanging with one another as you are walking?" And they stood still, looking sad. 18 One of them, named Cleopas, answered and said to Him, "Are You the only one visiting Jerusalem and unaware of the things which have happened here in these days?" 19 And He said to them, "What things?" And they said to Him, "The things about Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word in the sight of God and all the people, 20 and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to the sentence of death, and crucified Him. 21 But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, it is the third day since these things happened. 22 But also some women among us amazed us. When they were at the tomb early in the morning, 23 and did not find His body, they came, saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said that He was alive. 24 Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just exactly as the women also had said; but Him they did not see." 25 And He said to them, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" 27 Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures. 28 And they approached the village where they were going, and He acted as though He were going farther. 29 But they urged Him, saying, "Stay with us, for it is getting toward evening, and the day is now nearly over." So He went in to stay with them. 30 When He had reclined at the table with them, He took the bread and blessed it, and breaking it, He began giving it to them. 31 Then their eyes were opened and they recognized Him; and He vanished from their sight. 32 They said to one another, "Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?" 33 And they got up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found gathered together the eleven and those who were with them, 34 saying, "The Lord has really risen and has appeared to Simon." 35 They began to relate their experiences on the road and how He was recognized by them in the breaking of the bread. (Luke 24:13-35)*

The men testified that they knew about the report of the empty tomb (v. 24) and they had heard that Jesus was alive (v. 23). Somehow, their eyes were blinded to the reality of Jesus walking with them (v.16). It wasn't until Jesus ate with them that their eyes were opened to the reality of Jesus' identity (v. 31). Next, they immediately returned from Emmaus to Jerusalem in order to tell the disciples about their experience with their risen Lord (v. 33). By the time they made it back to Jerusalem it was Sunday evening. Luke said that the two men found "the eleven" gathered together, but we know that Thomas wasn't present and didn't see the risen Lord Jesus for eight more days (John 20:26). Possibly Thomas stepped away before the two men arrived, or Luke used the term "the eleven" in a general sense. Nevertheless, the two testified that Jesus really had risen from the dead, and confirmed that Peter had also seen Jesus (v.34, 1 Corinthians 15:5). The two men humbly recounted that it wasn't until Jesus broke the bread with them that they recognized Him (v.35).

The big ideas behind the Gospel lesson are first, Jesus is alive, and His resurrection was affirmed not just by his disciples but by others. We can rest in the fact that the biblical account of Jesus'

resurrection is true in part because it includes unflattering details about the behavior of people. The men on the road to Emmaus didn't recognize Jesus even though He explained the things concerning Himself to them (v. 27). Second, Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies concerning His coming. The Prophets predicted Jesus birth, life, death and resurrection in amazing detail. As a student of the Bible we have to be willing to admit that prophecy is much easier to interpret after the predicted events have occurred. When we read the story of the two men on the road to Emmaus, we know the secret that they didn't understand until later. The Prophets themselves struggled with these same things. Peter said in 1 Peter, just before the section we will be reading later today, "As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful searches and inquiries, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow" (1 Peter 1:10-11).

Because of the complexities and nuances of the prophecies, I have oftentimes wanted to hear Jesus' explanation of the biblical prophecies to the two men. I have spent many hours pondering the Old Testament prophecies concerning Jesus with the significant advantage of hindsight of Jesus' death and resurrection. However, the men on the road to Emmaus didn't have the advantage of hindsight, their minds were buzzing with the events of the past several days (vv. 18-24). Finally, since the prophecies fulfilled concerning of the coming of the Lord Jesus are true, we can trust in the future fulfillment of the prophecies concerning Jesus' return. We can rest assured that Jesus will gather His elect when He comes to claim His Church. Paul said, "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus" (1Thessalonians 4:14).

Before we move onto the first reading, let's briefly look at the conclusion to the story of the two men on the road to Emmaus. As amazing as the story was about how the two men didn't recognize Jesus while they walked all the way to Emmaus and began to have dinner with him is what happened next in the two verses beyond the end of today's reading. Luke continued the account of the events that occurred after the men returned to Jerusalem to testify to the disciples:

> *36 While they were telling these things, He Himself stood in their midst. 37 But they were startled and frightened and thought that they were seeing a spirit. 38 And He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? 39 See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." (Luke 24:35-39)*

The closing of this story brings out a fourth theological truth from the lesson. Jesus is alive in the flesh, not just in the Spirit. In the same way, one day we too will be alive in the flesh. Job said prophetically in the oldest Book in the Bible, "As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, And at the last He will take His stand on the earth. Even after my skin is destroyed, Yet from my flesh I shall see God; Whom I myself shall behold, And whom my eyes will see and not another. My heart faints within me!" (Job 19:25-27). We can rejoice in the fact that one day we will receive a glorified body similar to Jesus (1 John 3:2). Beyond that, the whole world will pass away and be restored to a new, beautiful creation (Revelation 21:1).

As we leave the Gospel lesson and move onto the first reading, we return to Acts Chapter Two and the era of the newborn Church. Peter, the uncontested leader of the Faith, set up boldly fulfilling Jesus' commandment to build His Church (Matthew 28:16-20). The context of the passage occurs 40 days after Jesus' resurrection. He was with his disciples, now called "apostles" teaching them about the kingdom of God. At the end of 40 days, Jesus ascended to heaven, leaving them with the charge to wait in Jerusalem for the power of the Holy Spirit. When the apostles were gathered to celebrate the Jewish Feast of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came from heaven and gave them the ability to speak in other known languages for the benefit of proclaiming the truth of the Good news of Jesus' death and resurrection. There were many Jews who were in Jerusalem for this festival, and, amazingly enough; they were able to understand the disciples who were speaking in their native language. It was a miracle, a sign from God that he was in their midst. But some mocked and said that the men were drunk. In the confusion of all of this, Peter got up and explained what was happening. As you read, take note of the words with capitalized letters, noting that these reflect quotations from the Old Testament Scriptures. Also remember what you learned from the Gospel lesson in terms of how Jesus fulfilled so many biblical prophecies.

> *14 But Peter, taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them: "Men of Judea and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give heed to my words.*
>
> > **See Note Below [Omitted verses: 15 "For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only the third hour of the day; 16 but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel: 17 'AND IT SHALL BE IN THE LAST DAYS,' God says, 'THAT I WILL POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT ON ALL MANKIND; AND YOUR SONS AND YOUR DAUGHTERS SHALL PROPHESY, AND YOUR YOUNG MEN SHALL SEE VISIONS, AND YOUR OLD MEN SHALL DREAM DREAMS; 18 EVEN ON MY BONDSLAVES, BOTH MEN AND WOMEN, I WILL IN THOSE DAYS POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT And they shall prophesy. 19 'AND I WILL GRANT WONDERS IN THE SKY ABOVE AND SIGNS ON THE EARTH BELOW, BLOOD, AND FIRE, AND VAPOR OF SMOKE. 20 'THE SUN WILL BE TURNED INTO DARKNESS AND THE MOON INTO BLOOD, BEFORE THE GREAT AND GLORIOUS DAY OF THE LORD SHALL COME. 21 'AND IT SHALL BE THAT EVERYONE WHO CALLS ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.']*
>
> *22 "Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know– 23 this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. 24 But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power. 25 For David says of Him, 'I SAW THE LORD ALWAYS IN MY PRESENCE; FOR HE IS AT MY RIGHT HAND, SO THAT I WILL NOT BE SHAKEN. 26 'THEREFORE MY HEART WAS GLAD AND MY TONGUE EXULTED; MOREOVER MY FLESH ALSO WILL LIVE IN HOPE; 27 BECAUSE YOU WILL NOT ABANDON MY SOUL TO HADES, NOR ALLOW YOUR HOLY ONE TO UNDERGO DECAY. 28*

> *'YOU HAVE MADE KNOWN TO ME THE WAYS OF LIFE; YOU WILL MAKE ME FULL OF GLADNESS WITH YOUR PRESENCE.' 29 Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. 30 And so, because he was a prophet and knew that GOD HAD SWORN TO HIM WITH AN OATH TO SEAT one OF HIS DESCENDANTS ON HIS THRONE, 31 he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that HE WAS NEITHER ABANDONED TO HADES, NOR DID His flesh SUFFER DECAY. 32 This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses. 33 Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear. Acts 2:14-33*

Several points arise from the text. First, note that although Peter did present firsthand testimony about Jesus resurrection (v.32) he based most of his address on Jesus' fulfillment of the Old Testament prophetic Scriptures. This makes sense, since Peter is addressing a primarily Jewish crowd. He reasoned with them based on their frame of reference for the expectations of the Messiah. Second, Peter compared the biblical patriarch David with Jesus, saying that King David was still buried in the famous tomb, but since Jesus rose from the dead there was no such tomb for this King. To this very day nobody celebrates the burial place of Jesus. Instead, people visit Jerusalem to view a grave that is very much empty! Third, Peter explained that Jesus was the fulfillment of the Davidic promises, the One whom God had exalted to His very right hand. This means that Jesus is exalted by God the Father to a position of the highest possible favor with God, a place of extreme power and sovereignty. Fourth, Peter's address was yet another occurrence of the biblical phenomenon "but God," something which has vast significance, but especially so in regards to God's only means of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Peter used this phrase (v.24a) just before he explained the miraculous events that had happened over the course of the past fifty days. The phrase occurs frequently throughout the Bible. In fact, a search through the Bible reveals that the phrase occurs at least 42 times, here are some highlights:

- "But God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the cattle that were with him in the ark" (Genesis 8:1)
- "But God said, 'No, but Sarah your wife will bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; and I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him'" (Genesis 17:9)
- "But God will redeem my soul from the power of Sheol, For He will receive me" (Psalm 49:15)
- "Who can forgive sins, but God alone?" (Luke 5:21c)
- "But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power" (Acts 2:24).

Finally, the text from Saint Peter's address in the reading today:

Jesus is the Capstone of the "but God" statements in the Bible! But for God's plan of salvation through Jesus' sacrifice once and forever (Hebrews 10:12) all of us would be destined to an eternity apart from God because of the necessity of the payment of our sin debt to our Holy God (Romans

3:23, Romans 6:23, Matthew 7:19). Let's pause for a moment and reflect upon some of the "but God" moments that have occurred in our own lives.

For our context, this passage in the book of Acts brings an important implication of the truth of "but God" to our lives. One theological truth is that Jesus' death was not an accident, but was the definite plan of God. If God was able to use this ultimate injustice to bring about our salvation, isn't it possible that He could use unresolved and unjust circumstances in our own lives for his redemptive purposes? We have a hard time trusting that God can work all things together for good, but this is a shining example of God's great ability to turn evil on its head and gain the victory. Let us pray for God to do this in our own confusing circumstances and insert the mentality of "but God" into our perspective.

We conclude the study notes for today with the reading from 1 Peter. Peter addressed some of the same points that we discussed earlier in his address in the Book of Acts.

> *17 If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth; 18 knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, 19 but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ. 20 For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you 21 who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. (1 Peter 1:17-21)*

First, Peter emphasized the great and eternal value of Jesus' blood that He shed for us. He said that we ought to guard our behavior carefully (v. 17) because of the great price that Jesus paid for us through His blood. God paid a ransom for us (v. 17, "redeemed"), and that price was His Son Jesus. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Second, Peter affirmed the eternality and glory of Jesus as the One "foreknown before the foundation of the world" (v. 20a) who made a brief, physical appearance on earth in order to bring us hope through His resurrection from the dead (v. 20). Finally, Peter emphasized the necessity of faith for salvation (v. 21). While the Jews exercised faith through the Old Testament sacrificial system, this verse points out the New Testament understanding of that system: faith is the basis for reconciliation and relationship with God. As we saw in the Gospel reading today with the 2 men on the road to Emmaus, even though glimpses of the way to God had been provided to the Jews through the prophetic Scriptures, it took Jesus to explain it to them for them to be able to understand. The Jewish sacrificial system prefigured the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus on the cross at Calvary. Jesus was the Passover Lamb, the one slain since before the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8). In the same way that the disciples of Jesus didn't understand salvation through His sacrifice, we too require the explanation found in the New Testament for us to discover the only means of eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ.

What does all of this mean to you as you walk with Jesus throughout your daily lives? First, but for

God we would still be in our sins and the way to God would be closed. If we live with the truths of God in mind as we face challenges, we can find delight in them to know that God will work all things together for our good (Romans 8:28). Second, we must remember that even if men that spent several years with Jesus, or the Prophets themselves, didn't immediately understand God's plan of salvation through Jesus we too must not expect to become biblical scholars without study and leaning upon the wisdom of God through the inspired Scriptures. God calls us to study the Bible, for it is "precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, there a little (Isaiah 28:10). It's okay if we don't instantaneously comprehend deep insights and chiastic structures in the Bible! It's not that we lack information, but that we need to rely upon the Holy Spirit for interpretation and application. Jesus said, "But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come" (John 16:13). The Holy Spirit was the blessing that flowed out from God at Pentecost, a gift that put us in a privileged position above the Prophets, and even the angels (1 Peter 1:12).

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*The section that was omitted in the reading dealt with Peter's proclamation that the coming of the Holy Spirit was a *partial* fulfillment of the Prophet Joel's prophecy. Paul also quoted from Joel's prophecy when he said in Romans, "anyone who calls upon the Name of the Lord will be saved" (Romans 10:13).

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. We noted in the reading from the Book of Acts Peter's use of the phrase "but God" and followed up with a challenge to examine your life to recall some of your "but God" moments. We wish to extend this challenge to you by asking you to pray that God would bring one or two of these circumstances back to your memory. Share this testimony with someone who you sense may need your testimony of how God worked in your life.

2. Spend some time thanking Jesus for being the Lamb of God, redeeming you with His precious blood. What do you think would be a proper personal response to St. Peter's challenge to "conduct yourselves in fear" ("fear" meaning sober reverence for what has been done on your behalf)?

For Further Study

For those that are on Facebook, consider posting a paragraph on the Christians for Christ Facebook page regarding one of your "but God" moments. You can find this site online at:

https://www.facebook.com/ChristiansForChristMinistries

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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/050414.cfm

First Reading ACTS 2:14, 22-33 (plus *skipped verses*)

Acts 2:14-33 NAS95 14 But Peter, taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them: "Men of Judea and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give heed to my words.

15 "For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only the third hour of the day; 16 but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel: 17 'AND IT SHALL BE IN THE LAST DAYS,' God says, 'THAT I WILL POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT ON ALL MANKIND; AND YOUR SONS AND YOUR DAUGHTERS SHALL PROPHESY, AND YOUR YOUNG MEN SHALL SEE VISIONS, AND YOUR OLD MEN SHALL DREAM DREAMS; 18 EVEN ON MY BONDSLAVES, BOTH MEN AND WOMEN, I WILL IN THOSE DAYS POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT And they shall prophesy. 19 'AND I WILL GRANT WONDERS IN THE SKY ABOVE AND SIGNS ON THE EARTH BELOW, BLOOD, AND FIRE, AND VAPOR OF SMOKE. 20 'THE SUN WILL BE TURNED INTO DARKNESS AND THE MOON INTO BLOOD, BEFORE THE GREAT AND GLORIOUS DAY OF THE LORD SHALL COME. 21 'AND IT SHALL BE THAT EVERYONE WHO CALLS ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.'

22 "Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know– 23 this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. 24 "But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power. 25 "For David says of Him, 'I SAW THE LORD ALWAYS IN MY PRESENCE; FOR HE IS AT MY RIGHT HAND, SO THAT I WILL NOT BE SHAKEN. 26 'THEREFORE MY HEART WAS GLAD AND MY TONGUE EXULTED; MOREOVER MY FLESH ALSO WILL LIVE IN HOPE; 27 BECAUSE YOU WILL NOT ABANDON MY SOUL TO HADES, NOR ALLOW YOUR HOLY ONE TO UNDERGO DECAY. 28 'YOU HAVE MADE KNOWN TO ME THE WAYS OF LIFE; YOU WILL MAKE ME FULL OF GLADNESS WITH YOUR PRESENCE.' 29 "Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. 30 "And so, because he was a prophet and knew that GOD HAD SWORN TO HIM WITH AN OATH TO SEAT one OF HIS DESCENDANTS ON HIS THRONE, 31 he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that HE WAS NEITHER ABANDONED TO HADES, NOR DID His flesh SUFFER DECAY. 32 "This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses. 33 "Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear.

Second Reading 1 Peter 1:17-21

1 Peter 1:17-21 NAS95 17 If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth; 18 knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, 19 but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ. 20 For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you 21 who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and

hope are in God.

Gospel Reading LK 24:13-35

Luke 24:13-35 NAS95 13 And behold, two of them were going that very day to a village named Emmaus, which was about seven miles from Jerusalem. 14 And they were talking with each other about all these things which had taken place. 15 While they were talking and discussing, Jesus Himself approached and began traveling with them. 16 But their eyes were prevented from recognizing Him. 17 And He said to them, "What are these words that you are exchanging with one another as you are walking?" And they stood still, looking sad. 18 One of them, named Cleopas, answered and said to Him, "Are You the only one visiting Jerusalem and unaware of the things which have happened here in these days?" 19 And He said to them, "What things?" And they said to Him, "The things about Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word in the sight of God and all the people, 20 and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to the sentence of death, and crucified Him. 21 "But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, it is the third day since these things happened. 22 "But also some women among us amazed us. When they were at the tomb early in the morning, 23 and did not find His body, they came, saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said that He was alive. 24 "Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just exactly as the women also had said; but Him they did not see." 25 And He said to them, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! 26 "Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" 27 Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures. 28 And they approached the village where they were going, and He acted as though He were going farther. 29 But they urged Him, saying, "Stay with us, for it is getting toward evening, and the day is now nearly over." So He went in to stay with them. 30 When He had reclined at the table with them, He took the bread and blessed it, and breaking it, He began giving it to them. 31 Then their eyes were opened and they recognized Him; and He vanished from their sight. 32 They said to one another, "Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?" 33 And they got up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found gathered together the eleven and those who were with them, 34 saying, "The Lord has really risen and has appeared to Simon." 35 They began to relate their experiences on the road and how He was recognized by them in the breaking of the bread.

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 4-27-2014

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for 4-27-2014. Since this Sunday marks the first week after the celebration of Easter, the readings for today are focused upon the activities that occurred immediately after Jesus' resurrection from the dead. Since the grave could not hold Jesus, if we have faith in Him we can trust that someday we too will rise from the dead with an incorruptible body. This week we are beginning with the Gospel lesson in order to accentuate some of the themes that emerged from the Saint John's message. Then we will move onto the first reading from the Book of Acts and conclude with the second from First Peter, a study that will continue for the next several weeks.

The Gospel lesson is from the Gospel of Saint John. The context is just the evening of the day we call Resurrection Sunday, or Easter. Mary Magdalene had just told the disciples that Jesus had risen from the dead.

> *19 So when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and *said to them, "Peace be with you." 20 And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21 So Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you." 22 And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 "If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained." 24 But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples were saying to him, "We have seen the Lord!" But*

> *he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." 26 After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you." 27 Then He said to Thomas, "Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing." 28 Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed." 30 Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name. (John 20:19-31)*

The focus of the reading was Thomas' doubt and then his subsequent faith upon physically experiencing the resurrected Christ. As we saw in the second reading, Jesus proclaimed a blessing upon those that have not seen but yet have believed "v. 27d-e." The key point of the passage though was stated in the last two verses. "Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name" vv. 30-31).

Several other points can be drawn from the text, First, notice that Jesus entered the room without knocking, without even opening the door; He just walked right through the wall! Talk about a grand entrance, and it's no wonder the disciples were scared. The point is that Jesus had supernatural powers in His new, resurrected and glorified body. Second, although Jesus' resurrection body was different in it's capabilities, there was a one to one correspondence between Jesus' body that was crucified and laid in the grave and His resurrected body. Jesus' appearance to the disciples in His resurrection body served as a foretaste of the body that all believers will receive one day when Jesus returns. Jesus will be forever recognizable by the scars given to Him during His earthly lifetime. Though we will never be God, we will become **like** Him. Saint John said, "We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is" (1 John 3:2b). Third, since it was before the sending of the Holy Spirit the disciples were "in fear of the Jews" (v.19c). This contrasted greatly with what we read about the disciples and first believers in the first reading. Though we may fear those that persecute us, we, like the early Church, have the Holy Spirit of God living in us to give us boldness and hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Peter 1:3). Finally, Jesus was gentle with Thomas even though he expressed doubt among circumstances that we may consider compelling for him to believe. Since Jesus treated Thomas with such concern even though he doubted Him, we can be sure that Jesus walks with us through seasons of our own doubt.

Jesus bore the scars of His torture and crucifixion even after His resurrection. Although we don't know to what degree **we** will bear the scars of our own humiliation from men upon the earth, we can be certain that God will use our scars as an eternal testimony of our deliverance from the powers of darkness. We can rest assured that "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have

passed away" (Revelation 21:4).

Let's move onto the first reading from Chapter 2 of the Book of Acts. This Book was written by Luke, a physician and close companion of Saint Paul, sort of as a continuation of the Gospel by his name. Luke said in the opening chapter of Acts, "The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when He was taken up to heaven, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen" (Acts 1:1-2). When Doctor Luke said, "the first account," he was referring to the Gospel of Luke that he addressed to a certain man named Theophilus. Luke's "orderly account" (Luke 1:3) presented in his Gospel record included exact details concerning the birth and life of Jesus and continued all the way to Jesus' ascension to heaven (Luke 24:51). The Book of Acts retraces just a bit back to the point where Jesus promised He would soon send the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). The overall timeframe of the events recorded in Acts was from the beginning of the disciples' apostolic ministry to the world and concluding with Paul's arrest and subsequent journey to Rome for his trial.

A lot had happened by the time we reach the end of chapter 2 where we pick up with today's reading. Jesus had already been taken up to heaven in a cloud (Acts 1:9). Afterwards, Peter addressed a gathering of about 120 believers (Acts 1:15) with the purpose of telling how Judas' betrayal of Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies and then appointing the traitor's replacement. Lots were cast and Matthias was chosen to hold the twelfth seat (v. 26). The Day of Pentecost had come and the promised gift of the person of the Holy Spirit had been sent (2:1-3). This event launched the full-scale ministry of the apostles to the Jews, which later extended to the Gentiles and the whole world. As you read the text try to imagine the whirlwind of events that had just happened.

> *42 They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. 44 And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; 45 and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. 46 Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47)*

The Church at this point was largely communal, and marked by the lavish outworking of God through spiritual gifts and miracles. Though the disciples (except for John) had previously fled from Jesus during his arrest now they ministered with magnificent boldness and power through the Spirit of Jesus that lived inside of them (1 Peter 1:11). First, note that their worship continued in the temple, which was the former site of persecution by the same people that had put Jesus to death on the cross. Peter said that they "had favor with all the people" (v. 47a). Second, the number of believers began to expand exponentially, from just 11 to 3,000 in a very short time. "And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved" (v.47b). Third, the Church

began the regular celebration of communion to remember Jesus (v. 46b). Each time we take communion we join into the same celebration held by this first group of Jesus' believers. Finally, there was a special emphasis placed upon the ministries of preaching (prophecy), fellowship, communion, prayer and giving. Peter said, "They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (v. 42).

As we transition to the second reading, review in your mind the ministries that marked the Early Church: Preaching, fellowship, communion, prayer, and giving. Can you see how the Church has incorporated all of these foundational elements into each worship service?

The second reading is from the Epistle of First Peter where Saint Peter addressed groups of believers that were dispersed throughout Asia Minor who were undergoing persecution and losing hope in the promises of Christ. Peter addressed the book to "those who [were] elect exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia" (First Peter 1:1). Peter told them, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you" (4:12). Peter told them that they were sharing in the sufferings of Jesus Christ so that when Jesus returned they may "rejoice with exultation" (v. 13).

At the time of this writing, many in the world are suffering for their testimony of Jesus Christ. In fact, many report that there is currently more persecution happening to Christians around the world than has existed at any time since Jesus began the Church. Saint Paul warned, "evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived" (2 Timothy 3:13). This reality was being lived out in the church at Asia Minor and is not much different from what is being experienced by Christians all around the world today. This reading marks the beginning of a study of 1 Peter that will continue for the next several weeks.

> *3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, 7 so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; 8 and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, 9 obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls. (1 Peter 1:3-9)*

Peter said that God had caused believers to be "**born again** to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (v. 3b, emphasis added). The word "again" in the original is a different word than what Jesus used in His discussion with Nicodemus in John 3:3 when He said, "You must be born again (or from above, depending upon your Bible version)." In John's Gospel

Jesus' used a different word to create a word play providing a dual meaning of both "again" and "from above." Peter on the other hand used a word that specifically meant "again." Peter said in effect that a believer is born spiritually (a second type of birth) through God's great mercy to "a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (v. 3b).

Why all the fuss about the meaning of a particular word? Peter's point was that through the evidence of a person's spiritual birth a person has hope through the reality of Jesus' resurrection from the dead. By this time (~ mid-60's AD), the Church had reached the point that many were not direct witnesses to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Peter said, "though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls" (vv. 8-9). Peter said that although the people whom he addressed weren't eyewitnesses of Jesus, they still had the hope that Jesus' resurrection provided to all believers. Just because they experiencing persecution and weren't of the class of super apostles (see 2 Corinthians 11:5), they weren't inferior Christians (v. 6).

An important contrast exists between the Gospel lesson and the first reading from the Book of Acts. Did you notice that before the Holy Spirit was given that the disciples were fearful, then after the Holy Spirit came (Acts 2) they were ministering with a new sense of fervor? The presence of the Holy Spirit in one's life is what makes the difference between the cowering disciples and the bold disciples. Same people, different power source. Before, all they had was their will power – and as we know, it wasn't enough to keep them faithful to Jesus as He went to Calvary. However, now they had the presence of God's Spirit Himself living inside of them and giving them a new strength that went beyond their own strength.

I experienced something similar in terms of this contrast through an event that happened to me some years ago. Before I had placed my faith in Jesus Christ, I was striving to be a good, moral person. I knew right from wrong and tried hard to live up to the biblical standards that I heard about in Sunday Mass each week. However, I found that I did not have the strength to say no to the world's ways, even when I knew it was wrong. I remember a turning point occurred when God gave me the power to say not in a certain situation when a friend was attempting to use me to participate in some shady dealings. While I technically wasn't doing anything wrong, he was – and wanted me to join in with him. Each time I had joined him in the past I had felt horrible about it, but I didn't have the power to tell him no. That was until I gave my life to Jesus Christ, and God's power came into my life through the Holy Spirit living inside of me. On a particular evening God orchestrated a series of events through which I finally found the power to tell my friend no.

How about you? Meditate for a moment about a time when you felt torn between choosing to do something for God versus something that the world called you to do. How did you deal with the tension? Regardless of what you chose, can you look back on this particular event in your life and see how God could have orchestrated these circumstances in order to reveal His glory to you?

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

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1. Mother Teresa, when confronted with the suffering of millions of people in Calcutta expressed doubts during certain seasons of her life. Have you ever experienced a season of doubt during your Christian life? How did you deal with it? In light of what you studied in the Book of Acts, how can you tap into God's power source to deal with such events during the future?

2. We challenge you during the upcoming week to make a commitment to pray. Pray specifically that God would reveal to you one way in which you can testify to or pray for a person whom you sense is experiencing doubts in their faith. Write their name on a card and commit to pray for them at a certain time at least once this week. Second, if you are so bold, reach out to this person and let them know that you have been praying for them.

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/042714.cfm

First Reading ACTS 2:42-47

Acts 2:42-47 NAS95 42 They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. 44 And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; 45 and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. 46 Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Second Reading 1 PT 1:3-9

1 Peter 1:3-9 NAS95 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, 7 so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; 8 and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, 9 obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.

Gospel Reading JN 20:19-31

John 20:19-31 NAS95 19 So when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors

were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and *said to them, "Peace be with you." 20 And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21 So Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you." 22 And when He had said this, He breathed on them and *said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 "If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained." 24 But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples were saying to him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." 26 After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus *came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you." 27 Then He *said to Thomas, "Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing." 28 Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Jesus *said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed." 30 Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.

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 4-6-2014

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Welcome back to the Mass Notes for 4-6-2014. This week we open with a vision from the Prophet Ezekiel about the future resurrection of the people of Israel. Then we move to Saint Paul's Letter to the Romans and then conclude with the chronicle of Jesus' raising of Lazarus from the dead.

The first reading is from the Prophet Ezekiel Chapter 37. Here Ezekiel was given a prophecy concerning the future restoration of the Nation of Israel. This was one of a series of visions that God gave to Ezekiel the night before the messenger came to him with the news that Jerusalem had been destroyed (Ezekiel 21). Later in the Gospel lesson, we will see how Jesus made a tiny down payment on this promised restoration of Israel through the raising of Lazarus. As we study the text, it's important to be diligent to distinguish between God's promises to Israel versus those made to the people of God as a whole. Saint Paul explains God's future plan for Israel in Romans Chapter 11. It's also important to recognize how portions of the prophecy have already been fulfilled by the time we are reading this versus what is yet to be fulfilled – through both Israel and the Church. Though the Gentiles have been "ingrafted" into God's kingdom (Romans 11:17), they are distinct from His Chosen People the Jews. Read the text, noting that we included the first eleven verses for context, as our readers note that we are prone to doing!

> *1 The hand of the LORD was upon me, and He brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of the valley; and it was full of bones. 2 He caused me to pass among them round about, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley; and lo, they were very dry. 3 He said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And I answered, "O Lord GOD, You know." 4 Again He said to me, "Prophesy over these bones and say to them, 'O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD.' 5 "Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones, 'Behold, I will cause breath to enter you that you may come to life. 6 'I will put sinews on you, make flesh grow back on you, cover you with skin and put breath in you that you may come*

> *alive; and you will know that I am the LORD.'" 7 So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold, a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to its bone. 8 And I looked, and behold, sinews were on them, and flesh grew and skin covered them; but there was no breath in them. 9 Then He said to me, "Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they come to life."'" 10 So I prophesied as He commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they came to life and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army. 11 Then He said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel; behold, they say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope has perished. We are completely cut off.' 12 "Therefore prophesy and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves, My people; and I will bring you into the land of Israel. 13 "Then you will know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves and caused you to come up out of your graves, My people. 14 "I will put My Spirit within you and you will come to life, and I will place you on your own land. Then you will know that I, the LORD, have spoken and done it," declares the LORD.'" (Ezekiel 37:1-14)*

God promised to restore the spiritually dead Israel to life through the sending of His Holy Spirit (v.14). We can say that this prophecy was at least partially fulfilled during several different events, but the final fulfillment will not happen until Daniel's fortieth Week during the end times. First, it was partially fulfilled during the times of the Old Testament when the Jews returned from exile in Babylon and rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem. Second, the prophecy was partially fulfilled when Jesus Himself entered the temple (Mark 11:15). Third, the prophecy was partially fulfilled after Jesus' death and immediate entrance into heaven. We read from the Gospel of Saint Matthew:

> *51 And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth shook and the rocks were split. 52 The tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; 53 and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection they entered the holy city and appeared to many. (Matthew 27:51-53).*

Only Saint Matthew made mention of the miraculous mini-resurrection that occurred immediately after Jesus' death. Imagine the appearance of a group of saints rising from the graves and walking about the City of God (Jerusalem)? These were not like the walking dead from the popular horror movies of our day, these were the "walking living" prophesied by the Prophet Ezekiel!

Continuing on the partial fulfillments of Ezekiel's prophesy, the fourth way in which it was fulfilled was at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit of God was poured out onto the people in Acts 2:1-4. This was also the fulfillment of Joel's prophesy regarding the sending of the Holy Spirit (Joel 2:28-29).

Taking into consideration the whole council of Scripture, the verses in Ezekiel and all of the other verses put together indicate that not only will Israel experience a spiritual awakening in the future, they, along with all of the believers in God the Messiah, will also experience a physical resurrection. In regards to the Nation of Israel, Ezekiel indicated that God would complete His divine plan

through a future restoration of a national Israel. What form this will take, and whether the current re-gathering that is already happening will mature into final embodiment of what God has predicted is unknown.

As believers, we live with the hope of this resurrection, and this was the hope of which Paul spoke in 1 Thessalonians Chapter 4. There Paul said, "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus" (1Thessalonians 4:14). He continued, "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. 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" (vv. 16-17). Like what the saints experienced during their physical resurrection in Jerusalem immediately after Jesus gave His life for them, we too will experience resurrection. Later in the Gospel message we will see another of the types of "first fruits" of resurrection through Jesus raising of Lazarus. Lazarus rising from the dead was different from what is promised to him and all believers because he died a second physical death (Hebrews 9:27).

The importance of the resurrection prophesied in Ezekiel is multidimensional. For one, it shows God's power over death. Humans have devised a lot of ways to defeat common enemies that prematurely take physical life, but we have yet to find a cure for death. Jesus has conquered the grave, which shows that He is powerful enough to handle all the lesser stresses that we face (Eph. 1:18-20). I sometimes joke with people that if your problems require resurrection power or less, God's got you covered. Anything above that, though, and you're out of luck. Second, the bodily resurrection of the saints allows us to live with an eternal perspective. This gives us the impetus for a counter-cultural lifestyle that is able to give ourselves away for higher purposes, because we know that this life is not all there is. Third, if we have said good-bye to loved ones in the Lord, the resurrection of the saints comforts us that death has lost its victory and sting (1 Corinthians 15:55). We will see our loved ones again in the Lord's presence.

The second reading is from Chapter 8 of Saint Paul's Letter to the Romans. In this section Paul explained how only the spiritual man can please God, "because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God (vv. 7-8)." We included the first seven verses in order to provide the context:

> *1 Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. 3 For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, 4 so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. 5 For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. 6 For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, 7 because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God,*

> *for it is not even able to do so, 8 and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. 9 However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. 10 If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. 11 But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. (Romans 8:1-11)*

Paul encouraged the Roman believers by telling them that they are not living in the flesh since (and if) the Holy Spirit of Christ lives in them (v.9). He said that those "in the flesh," meaning those on the broad road of destruction (Matthew 7:13), cannot please God; no matter how hard they try. In contrast, since the believer is born from above (John 3:3), the Holy Spirit gives them spiritual life in the present time and in the future will give them eternal, physical life (v.11). Paul said about the latter, "He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you" (v.11b). This is a powerful hope given to us by God. We have an eternal way of life through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord!

The second reading dovetails very nicely into the Gospel lesson from Saint John Chapter 11 covering the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. As we noted in the first reading from the Prophet Ezekiel, Lazarus' physical resurrection is a kind of first glimpse of what will happen to all believers in the literal, physical resurrection which is coming at the end of this age. Saint Paul said the following about this in 1 Corinthians 15:

> *50 Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. 51 Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. 53 For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. 54 But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory. (1 Corinthians 15:50-54)*

The context of the Gospel lesson was during the time of the Feast of Dedication (John 10:22). Jesus had just finished making several bold claims about his identity as God in the flesh. He said, "I and the Father are One" (v.30). Because of this statement the Pharisees once again tried to stone Him, but again he evidently hid Himself from them and "escaped from their hands" (v.39b). Next Jesus travelled to Bethabara (John 10:40, John 1:28) where many came to believe in him (John 10:42). As you read the text try to see it in light of the fact that Jesus knew that He would die at the hands of His own people (John 18:4), an event that occurred just over a week after the time He heard the news about Lazarus.

> *1 Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. 2 It was the Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped His feet with her hair,*

*whose brother Lazarus was sick. 3 So the sisters sent word to Him, saying, "Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick." 4 But when Jesus heard this, He said, "This sickness is not to end in death, but for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by it." 5 Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. 6 So when He heard that he was sick, He then stayed two days longer in the place where He was. 7 Then after this He *said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." 8 The disciples *said to Him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone You, and are You going there again?" 9 Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. 10 But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him." 11 This He said, and after that He *said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I go, so that I may awaken him out of sleep." 12 The disciples then said to Him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover." 13 Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that He was speaking of literal sleep. 14 So Jesus then said to them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, 15 and I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, so that you may believe; but let us go to him." 16 Therefore Thomas, who is called Didymus, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, so that we may die with Him." 17 So when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the tomb four days. 18 Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off; 19 and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary, to console them concerning their brother. 20 Martha therefore, when she heard that Jesus was coming, went to meet Him, but Mary stayed at the house. 21 Martha then said to Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. 22 "Even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You." 23 Jesus *said to her, "Your brother will rise again." 24 Martha *said to Him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." 25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?" 27 She *said to Him, "Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world." 28 When she had said this, she went away and called Mary her sister, saying secretly, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." 29 And when she heard it, she got up quickly and was coming to Him. 30 Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha met Him. 31 Then the Jews who were with her in the house, and consoling her, when they saw that Mary got up quickly and went out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there. 32 Therefore, when Mary came where Jesus was, she saw Him, and fell at His feet, saying to Him, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died." 33 When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit and was troubled, 34 and said, "Where have you laid him?" They *said to Him, "Lord, come and see." 35 Jesus wept. 36 So the Jews were saying, "See how He loved him!" 37 But some of them said, "Could not this man, who opened the eyes of the blind man, have kept this man also from dying?" 38 So Jesus, again being deeply moved within, came to the tomb. Now it was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. 39 Jesus said, "Remove the stone." Martha, the sister of the deceased, *said to Him, "Lord, by this time there will be a stench, for he has been dead four days." 40 Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?" 41*

> *So they removed the stone. Then Jesus raised His eyes, and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. 42 "I knew that You always hear Me; but because of the people standing around I said it, so that they may believe that You sent Me." 43 When He had said these things, He cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth." 44 The man who had died came forth, bound hand and foot with wrappings, and his face was wrapped around with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go." 45 Therefore many of the Jews who came to Mary, and saw what He had done, believed in Him. (John 11:1-45)*

Did you notice the repeating of certain key phrases throughout the text? Verses 17 – 39 follow a literary structure known as a "chiasm" which the author used in order to focus attention to a central portion of the text. The pattern is one of repeating or contrasting ideas on either side of a central verse that indicates the main focus of the author. Here the pattern picks up in verse 17 and 39. "So when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the tomb four days," (v.17, emphasis added) and "Martha, the sister of the deceased, said to Him, 'Lord, by this time there will be a stench, for he has been dead four days'" (v.39, emphasis added). A second phrase repeats in verses 21 and 32. "**Martha** then said to Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died," (v. 21, emphasis added) and "Therefore, when **Mary** came where Jesus was, she saw Him, and fell at His feet, saying to Him, 'Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died'" (v.32, emphasis added). Notice that both Martha and Mary independently confirmed their belief that Jesus had the power to prevent Lazarus from dying from his sickness. The final repeating pattern is in verses 20 and 29 in which first Martha went to meet Jesus (v.21) and then Mary (v.29). The literary structure finally points to the main focus of the verses sandwiched between those containing repeating or contrasting ideas. This is found in verses 25 – 26: "Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?'"

The central passages from the chiasm above, taken with Jesus' opening statement in verse 4, illuminate the central truth in the Gospel lesson. "But when Jesus heard this, He said, 'This sickness is not to end in death, but for the glory of God, **so that the Son of God may be glorified by it**'" (v.4). And again, "Jesus said to her, '**I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?'"** (vv. 25-26). When Jesus said "I am" He made a powerful claim of divinity. In Chapter 10 Jesus repeated this phrase no less than five times which led to John saying, "There was again division among the Jews because of these words " (John 10:19). The bottom line is this. The purpose of Jesus' healing of Lazarus was for Jesus to glorify Himself as God (I am) because He is the only bearer of eternal life for all who believe.

Now let's look at some other details that emerge from the text. As Jesus approached the tomb, Martha warned Jesus that since Lazarus had been dead for four days there would be a stench. It's highly likely that she had either already smelled a dead body before, or possibly even smelled the odor that was coming out of Lazarus tomb. Regardless of the case, Martha showed concern for Jesus even though she desired for Him to do something about Lazarus. We don't know whether either Mary or Martha believed Jesus could (or would) physically raise Lazarus from the dead. Martha

testified that she believed Ezekiel's prophesy regarding the resurrection that we saw in the first reading. She said, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day" (v.25).

Have you ever smelled the horrible stench of death? If you have, you would understand the reason for Martha's concern for Jesus in approaching Lazarus' tomb. I experienced the smell of death many years ago in my hometown, which is something that I have never forgotten. I remember one particular weekend when a car accident resulted in two deaths. Afterwards the fire department came and washed down the scene in an attempt to erase some of the carnage, and then the cars were towed to the local auto garage. Curiosity may have killed the cat but I just had to visit the auto garage parking lot to inspect the carnage. As I approached the crumpled up car and was still a good distance away I noticed a very strange odor. As I got closer, I smelled one of the most horrible odors that I had ever smelled in my life up to that point, and I was born on a farm with three brothers! It was so bad that I asked myself, what was I thinking by coming over here to see the wreckage? Now over 30 years later I can still remember the stench. Martha knew about this as well, that the smell of death was so bad that she needed to warn Jesus. The importance of this point for our daily lives is to remind us of Christ's power over not only the stench of death (which is very real), but also the consequences of death itself. Praise be to God!

The text said that Jesus was **deeply moved** with concern for Lazarus and his sisters. John said so twice in the text (verses 33 and 38). This story contains the shortest verse in the Bible, verse 35, "Jesus wept." Of course, the verse markings were added to the Bible much later than the original writing. However, clearly John's recording of Jesus' response to his friends' Mary, Martha and Lazarus is extremely significant. If Jesus, God in the flesh, Immanuel, meaning "God with us" wept over the death of a single friend, how much more does God grieve over *our* pain, suffering and eventual death?

What happened next probably astounded them beyond words. When Jesus called to Lazarus from the tomb, he emerged alive as a living testimony to God's power over death. Evidently, many other Jews were watching and because of this miracle they too came to believe in Jesus as the Messiah (v.44). What a glorious celebration they must have had. The sisters' terrible suffering turned into immense joy as Lazarus was not only brought back to life but also healed from the condition which resulted in his death in the first place.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. The main point of the story of Lazarus' was to show this central truth that Jesus declared about Himself:

"I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?"

Jesus still declares this truth about Himself and asks the question to you. Do you believe this? If so, what difference does this make in your life? If not, what is holding you back from believing His resurrection power?

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2. The second reading from Romans 8 sets up a sharp contrast between living according to the flesh or living according the Spirit. Turn back to that and **underline** the words/phrases that describe the flesh and **circle** the words/phrases that describe the Spirit. Which of these words/phrases most describe your present condition? Which words/phrases would you like to be descriptive of you? Talk to God about this desire.

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/040614.cfm

First Reading EZ 37:12-14 (Plus added verses for context)

Ezekiel 37:1-14 NAS95 1 The hand of the LORD was upon me, and He brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of the valley; and it was full of bones. 2 He caused me to pass among them round about, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley; and lo, they were very dry. 3 He said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And I answered, "O Lord GOD, You know." 4 Again He said to me, "Prophesy over these bones and say to them, 'O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD.' 5 "Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones, 'Behold, I will cause breath to enter you that you may come to life. 6 'I will put sinews on you, make flesh grow back on you, cover you with skin and put breath in you that you may come alive; and you will know that I am the LORD.'" 7 So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold, a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to its bone. 8 And I looked, and behold, sinews were on them, and flesh grew and skin covered them; but there was no breath in them. 9 Then He said to me, "Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they come to life."'" 10 So I prophesied as He commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they came to life and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army. 11 Then He said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel; behold, they say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope has perished. We are completely cut off.' 12 "Therefore prophesy and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves, My people; and I will bring you into the land of Israel. 13 "Then you will know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves and caused you to come up out of your graves, My people. 14 "I will put My Spirit within you and you will come to life, and I will place you on your own land. Then you will know that I, the LORD, have spoken and done it," declares the LORD.'"

Second Reading ROM 8:8-11 (plus added verses for context)

Romans 8:1-11 NAS95 1 Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. 3 For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, 4 so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. 5 For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the

Spirit. 6 For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, 7 because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, 8 and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. 9 However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. 10 If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. 11 But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

Gospel Reading JN 11:1-45

John 11:1-45 NAS95 1 Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. 2 It was the Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. 3 So the sisters sent word to Him, saying, "Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick." 4 But when Jesus heard this, He said, "This sickness is not to end in death, but for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by it." 5 Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. 6 So when He heard that he was sick, He then stayed two days longer in the place where He was. 7 Then after this He *said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." 8 The disciples *said to Him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone You, and are You going there again?" 9 Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. 10 "But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him." 11 This He said, and after that He *said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I go, so that I may awaken him out of sleep." 12 The disciples then said to Him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover." 13 Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that He was speaking of literal sleep. 14 So Jesus then said to them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, 15 and I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, so that you may believe; but let us go to him." 16 Therefore Thomas, who is called Didymus, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, so that we may die with Him." 17 So when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the tomb four days. 18 Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off; 19 and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary, to console them concerning their brother. 20 Martha therefore, when she heard that Jesus was coming, went to meet Him, but Mary stayed at the house. 21 Martha then said to Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. 22 "Even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You." 23 Jesus *said to her, "Your brother will rise again." 24 Martha *said to Him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." 25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?" 27 She *said to Him, "Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world." 28 When she had said this, she went away and called Mary her sister, saying secretly, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." 29 And when she heard it, she *got up quickly and was coming to Him. 30 Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha met Him. 31 Then the Jews who were with her in the house, and consoling her, when they saw that Mary got up quickly and went out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there. 32 Therefore, when Mary came where Jesus was, she saw Him, and fell at His feet, saying to Him, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died." 33 When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit and was troubled, 34 and said, "Where have you laid him?" They *said to Him, "Lord, come and see." 35 Jesus wept. 36 So the Jews were saying, "See how He loved him!" 37 But some of them said, "Could not this man, who opened the eyes of the blind man, have kept this man also from dying?" 38 So Jesus, again being deeply moved within, *came to the tomb. Now it was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. 39 Jesus *said, "Remove the stone." Martha, the sister of the deceased, *said to Him, "Lord, by this time there will be a stench, for he has been dead four days." 40 Jesus *said to her, "Did I not say to you that if you believe, you will

see the glory of God?" 41 So they removed the stone. Then Jesus raised His eyes, and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. 42 "I knew that You always hear Me; but because of the people standing around I said it, so that they may believe that You sent Me." 43 When He had said these things, He cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth." 44 The man who had died came forth, bound hand and foot with wrappings, and his face was wrapped around with a cloth. Jesus *said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go." 45 Therefore many of the Jews who came to Mary, and saw what He had done, believed in Him.

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Study Notes for the Sunday Mass November 10 2013 – 32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time



How can believers cope with difficult events in their lives? Sometimes a helpful insight from the Bible has presented itself with sudden clarity. This was the case recently while I was reading from the Book of Job (pronounced "jobe"), Chapter 19.

This Book was written about a man that God allowed to be afflicted by Satan. It is one of the earliest Books in the Old Testament with most scholars agreeing that the events in the book date to the era of the Patriarchs. This battle between God's man, Job, and the enemy of God, Satan, happened outside of Job's knowledge or understanding. Through it all Job lost his ten children, most of his possessions, and then finally his health. Though Job was the victim of Satan's attack, in the end God restored many of the things that Job had lost. However, through it all Job held steadfastly to his faith in God and the belief that there was abundant life beyond this physical world.

In this section of Chapter 19, Job had just finished a long lament about all of the bad things that God had allowed to occur in his life. "My breath is offensive to my wife, and I am loathsome to my own brothers. Even young children despise me; I rise up and they speak against me. All my associates abhor me, And those I love have turned against me" (Job 19:17-19 NASB). Next, read the particular section of that chapter about which I said almost jumped off the page at me.

> *Oh that my words were written! Oh that they were inscribed in a book! 24 That with an iron stylus and lead they were engraved in the rock forever! 25 And as for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, And at the last He will take His stand on the earth. 26 Even after my skin is destroyed, Yet from my flesh I shall see God; 27 Whom I myself shall behold, And whom my eyes shall see and not another. My heart faints within me. (Job 19:23-27 NASB)*

The key point of this section was that Job's hope of physical resurrection provided comfort for him throughout the affliction that occurred during his physical life. Somehow Job will stand in his flesh after it's destroyed and see his Redeemer with his own eyes! Job's hope wasn't for some sort of ethereal, heavenly body with which he would move about the clouds. His belief was that he would one day stand face to face and meet God while in a new physical body. His new body would be purified in such a way that he could stand before a Holy God. It's no wonder Job said, "My heart faints within me." How ironic it was that Job hoped his words would be written in a book, the very book from which we just read!

Job wasn't the only Old Testament believer who believed in a physical resurrection, though the stories don't quite leap off the page as the former one. Godly King David, who as a result of being judged for his sin of adultery with Bathsheba endured the passing of his infant son. Nathan the Prophet brought David the bad news. "Then David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the LORD.' And Nathan said to David, 'The LORD also has taken away your sin; you shall not die. However, because by this deed you have given occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also that is born to you shall surely die'" (2 Samuel 12:13-14). After his son died, David said, "While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, 'Who knows, the LORD may be gracious to me, that the child may live.' But now he has died; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me" (vv. 22-23). David expressed belief that he would see his son again, in the next life, but his son would not be with him in this life.

The Prophet Daniel also taught about the resurrection of believers to life. In Chapter 12, he opened with a warning about the coming tribulation period that would overcome the earth about which we spoke last week. Next, he provided hope to believers (and terror to unbelievers) about the resurrection of the dead.

> *1 Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands guard over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued. 2 "And many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt. (Daniel 12:1-2 NASB)*

Daniel's message provided hope to those in his immediate audience, those taken captive to Babylon during their deportation in 605 BC. As we turn to the Gospel reading for today, let's discover how God's teaching about the resurrection helps to provide us with hope during our times of tribulation. As you study the Gospel lesson for today see if, as happened to me while I read the Book of Job, anything jumps off the page at you.

> *27 Now there came to Him some of the Sadducees (who say that there is no resurrection), 28 and they questioned Him, saying, "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that IF A MAN'S BROTHER DIES, having a wife, AND HE IS CHILDLESS, HIS BROTHER SHOULD TAKE THE WIFE AND RAISE UP OFFSPRING TO HIS BROTHER. 29 "Now there were seven brothers; and the first took a wife, and died childless; 30 and the second 31 and the third took her; and in the same way all seven died, leaving no children. 32 "Finally the woman died also. 33 "In the resurrection therefore, which one's wife will she be? For all seven had her as wife." 34 And Jesus said to them, "The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, 35 but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage; 36 for neither can they die anymore, for they are like angels, and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection. 37 "But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the passage about the burning bush, where he calls the Lord THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, AND THE GOD OF ISAAC, AND THE GOD OF JACOB. 38 "Now He is not the God of the dead, but of the living; for all live to Him." (Luke 20:27-38 NASB)*

Let me provide some historical background to help you to understand Luke's message. First, although the concept may seem strange to us today, the Sadducees argument related to the Jewish legal concept known as Levirate Marriage found in Deuteronomy 25:5. "When brothers live together and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the deceased shall not be married outside the family to a strange man. Her husband's brother shall go in to her and take her to himself as wife and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her." The usefulness of Levirate Marriage in that society was something that we saw wonderfully displayed in the life of Ruth found in the Old Testament Book of the same name. Boaz, said, "Moreover, I have acquired Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of Mahlon, to be my wife in order to raise up the name of the deceased on his inheritance, so that the name of the deceased will not be cut off from his brothers or from the court of his birth place; you are witnesses today" (Ru 4:10). Levirate Marriage provided an important means of insuring the

continuance of a family line. Ruth's marriage to Boaz was ***extremely*** important to God because it was through Ruth that Jesus was born! "Salmon was the father of Boaz by Rahab, Boaz was the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse" (Mt 1:5).

Second, The Sadducees were an interesting bunch of legalistic Jewish believers who held the majority power in the religious court authority called the Sanhedrin in First Century Israel. They held different beliefs than the other group called the Pharisees. The Sadducees didn't believe in the afterlife, and only held the first five Books of the Bible to be authoritative. This last thing led them to hold some unusual beliefs since they didn't have the benefit of the vast array of historical or prophetic Books in the Old Testament Bible through which to properly interpret the Jewish Law. With this background in mind let's take a deeper look at the Gospel text.

The Sadducees approached Jesus with false motives. They were not truly seeking truth from Jesus, but instead were trying to stump him. They wanted to trip Him up in this theological chess game. Looking back to the previous section Luke said about the scribes and Pharisees, "So they watched Him, and sent spies who pretended to be righteous, in order that they might catch Him in some statement, so that they could deliver Him to the rule and the authority of the governor" (Luke 20:20). This previous verse was directed at the other group known as the Pharisees, ones who *did* believe in the resurrection. In the Gospel text today Jesus addressed the particular beliefs of the other group, the Sadducees. Jesus, seeing the Sadducees motives and the faultiness of their presuppositions, treated them with dignity and grace. Yet they set up an impossible scenario for Jesus to answer based upon their belief system. Jesus explained where they were off base in their reasoning, and His points were as follows.

- Marriage is a valid paradigm for this age but not in the one to come.
- In order to receive eternal life, one must be considered worthy. How does one become worthy of life after death? He states they must be "sons of God" (v.36). How does one become a son on God? Jesus said in the Gospel of John, Chapter 20:31-32, "Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this Book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:30-31). Also, "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12-13). Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me will live even if he dies" (John 11:25).
- We will not experience death in the life to come. There we will be like angels in that we no longer will have the capacity to die. We will be eternal and in that regard will be like God. "Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is" (1John 3:2).
- Sons of God are the sons of the resurrection. God's resurrection life lives in us, making us like Him. The Apostle Peter said, "For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the

corruption that is in the world by lust" (2 Peter 1:4).

- Jesus pointed to the Old Testament Pentateuch, which was the only piece of the Bible in which the Sadducees believed, to prove His point about the resurrection. Jesus said that since Moses used the present tense in describing the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, this proved from the Sadducees own Holy Scriptures that there is life after death on earth. Checkmate, game over!

The main point of this passage was Jesus' teaching of the truth of the resurrection, which is the central hope for Christian believers. Jesus taught His disciples that he would be resurrected, and later all of His believers have the hope that they too will one day rise from the dead with an eternal, perfect body. The Apostle Paul taught a great deal about the importance of the resurrection of Jesus. Let's take time to read what he said.

> *But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied. (1 Corinthians 15:13-19)*

Even though the Sadducees only believed that they would go around once in life, they believed in the biblical truths from the Old Testament Pentateuch. Jesus showed them that they were responsible for their actions in this life. Jesus graciously taught them through their own Scriptures that their eternal destiny was a direct result of their choices made during their lives. They were responsible for paying careful attention to the walk with God. Jesus said, "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24). Believers are transformed through the resurrection into a "world" that is also transformed, a place where sin no longer exists and God will walk among us. Like Job, we can look forward to eternal life with God through the promises made by Jesus that "we are saved by grace through faith and that not of ourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Now let's look at the second reading from Second Thessalonians Chapter 2.

> *16 Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us eternal comfort and good hope by grace, 17 comfort and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word. 1 Finally, brethren, pray for us that the word of the Lord may spread rapidly and be glorified, just as it did also with you; 2 and that we may be delivered from perverse and evil men; for not all have faith. 3 But the Lord is faithful, and He will strengthen and protect you from the evil one. 4 And we have confidence in the Lord concerning you, that you are doing and will continue to do what we command. 5 And may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the steadfastness of Christ. (2 Thessalonians 2:16 – 3:5)*

In this we see that Paul experienced suffering and prayed for the Thessalonian believers to be comforted in their affliction. I t is important to note that a biblical perspective never assumes that Christians will not suffer. The difference is that we have hope beyond this world, as Paul says, "eternal comfort" (v.16). It is God's love that provides comfort, hope and strength to keep walking in the good works that He has prepared in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:10). Instead of being sidetracked by suffering and opposition, Paul asked his fellow believers to pray for them that God would cause His Word to spread and be honored among the people who have not yet heard. Paul recognized the reality of suffering, but did not see the situation as hopeless. He turned to God for help and hope.

The question for us to consider is, "What do *we* turn to for help and hope? Some turn to alcohol to deaden the pain, or prescription drugs. Others to turn people like their spouse, children, or parents. While not all of these sources are bad they are all finite. God is the only One big enough to take care of us. May we learn to turn to God for help and hope. And may we learn to share or need for prayer with others like Paul did so that we are not alone.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. What is the importance of the resurrection for you? What difference does knowing the truth of the resurrection make in your day to day life as a Christian?

2. Describe the importance of sharing your faith with nonbelievers. How does the promise of God to give you a new eternally perfect body free from pain and one in which you will be free from sin and able to stand with God in your flesh – just as Job described, motivate you to share with others this good news?

3. Job endured some very difficult trials during his life which led him to question his beliefs but yet he held firm to his hope in the resurrection. We may ask, "If God is good, why do bad things happen, even if we are believers in Jesus Christ?" Perhaps you haven't given much thought to developing a theology of suffering. What are some key points that you have learned from your study today regarding how God uses suffering to accomplish His purposes in your life?

For Further Study

Mike was one of the fastest runners on his track team until he was injured during a terrible motorcycle accident. Hear how he found hope through this time of tribulation through God's Word and his identification with the Book of Job (25 minutes, Words to Live By radio program, RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, Michigan): http://www.christiansforchrist.org/96a

Listen to Os Guinness's video message about, "If God is God then why do bad things happen?" (24 minutes, Day of Discovery TV program, RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, Michigan):

http://www.christiansforchrist.org/96x

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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/111013.cfm Thirty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading

2 MC 7:1-2, 9-14

Second Reading

2 Thessalonians 2:16 – 3:5 NASB 16 Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us eternal comfort and good hope by grace, 17 comfort and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word. 1 Finally, brethren, pray for us that the word of the Lord may spread rapidly and be glorified, just as it did also with you; 2 and that we may be delivered from perverse and evil men; for not all have faith. 3 But the Lord is faithful, and He will strengthen and protect you from the evil one. 4 And we have confidence in the Lord concerning you, that you are doing and will continue to do what we command. 5 And may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the steadfastness of Christ.

Gospel Reading

Luke 20:27-38 NASB 27 Now there came to Him some of the Sadducees (who say that there is no resurrection), 28 and they questioned Him, saying, "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that IF A MAN'S BROTHER DIES, having a wife, AND HE IS CHILDLESS, HIS BROTHER SHOULD TAKE THE WIFE AND RAISE UP OFFSPRING TO HIS BROTHER. 29 "Now there were seven brothers; and the first took a wife, and died childless; 30 and the second 31 and the third took her; and in the same way all seven died, leaving no children. 32 "Finally the woman died also. 33 "In the resurrection therefore, which one's wife will she be? For all seven had her as wife." 34 And Jesus said to them, "The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, 35 but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage; 36 for neither can they die anymore, for they are like angels, and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection. 37 "But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the passage about the burning bush, where he calls the Lord THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, AND THE GOD OF ISAAC, AND THE GOD OF JACOB. 38 "Now He is not the God of the dead, but of the living; for all live to Him."

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