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

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 10-30-2016



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we look at a reading from Saint Paul's Second Letter to the Thessalonians and then the Gospel reading from Saint Luke. The first reading is from the Apocrypha and will not be covered.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

It was a very windy midsummer day in northern Michigan as I raced my windsurf board across the Straits of Mackinaw on my way back from Mackinaw Island, Michigan. Earlier, I sailed between the towers of the mighty Mackinaw Bridge and then returned to the shore of Lake Huron to make a few adjustments on my sail. Next, I sailed seven miles across the Straits to Mackinaw Island and was on my way back towards the campground where we were staying. At this point the wind began calming and shifting in a direction that was going to make it very difficult to return to the spot from where I had launched. Eventually I made it back to the sandy shore on Lake Huron, but was a few miles down from where I launched. I walked up the hill, borrowed a cell phone from someone, and called my wife to pick me up. I heard a strange silence on the other end and she said, "You're alive!" As it turned out someone had given some bad information to the police who then called the Coast Guard thinking that I had gone down somewhere in the Straits. This led to a series of cascading events including a large manhunt with a helicopter, rescue divers, and local police operating from a command center in a marina in Mackinaw City. Evidently, a fellow camper had been watching me from the shore and at some point, she couldn't locate me. She then proceeded to tell one of the

authorities at the campground who then called the police. The police then alerted the Coast Guard and the manhunt was on! The whole affair began by one piece of bad information. [*If you are interested you can read the story online here:*

http://www.cheboygannews.com/article/20130720/NEWS/130719421]

In the same way that a false report led to a series of cascading events that day while I was windsurfing, false information in the church can lead to a plethora of serious effects in the Christian church. This was the case in the second reading today from Paul's Second Letter to the Thessalonians. This was Paul's second written communication to this group of believers who had believed some false information concerning the timing of and events surrounding the return of the Lord Jesus. The overall purpose of the letter also included the encouragement of the believers in Thessalonica during their ongoing persecution for their faith.

Read the text including verses 3 – 12 which were skipped in the lectionary and are necessary understand the context and the points which Paul were addressing.

Second Reading:

11 With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith. 12 We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. 2:1 Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, 2 not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come. 3 Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. 4 He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God. 5 Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? 6 And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. 7 For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. 8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. 9 The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, 10 and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. 11 For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie 12 and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness. (2 THES 1:11-2: 12 NIV)

The key verses that revealed the context of Paul's address in this section were chapter 2 verses 1-2. "Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to

have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come." Evidently, the people had believed a false report from a forged letter reportedly written by Paul that Jesus had already returned. This news was very disturbing to the Thessalonians because they were enduring persecution for Jesus and if He had already returned then they had possibly been suffering for nothing. Paul had explained in his first letter to them how believers would meet the Lord Jesus upon his return. "According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever" (1Th 4:15-17). The phrase "caught up" in the original language is the word "harpazo" which means to snatch or take away. The same word translated in the Latin is "rapturo." Although the timing of this biblical event is unknown, Paul's teaching provided hope for the Thessalonian believers who were undergoing persecution. Paul was clear that Jesus' return wasn't something that they possibly could have missed since every single believer would be affected.

The Day of the Lord (DOL) is a very significant topic in both the Old and New Testament. The DOL is the time when Jesus will return for His Church and the Father will pour out His wrath on unbelievers. The interpretation of the meaning of DOL depends upon the theological grid from which you view the events of the end times. Most scholars believe that the DOL occurs in the middle of what is called the tribulation period, what the Book of Daniel calls this period the 70'th week. "Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city" (Daniel 9:24). The DOL marks the beginning of the second half of the period known as the Great Tribulation. Joel said about this period, "Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy hill. Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming. It is close at hand–a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness. Like dawn spreading across the mountains a large and mighty army comes, such as never was of old nor ever will be in ages to come" (Joel 2:1-2). He also said that this was a time of redemption, for many people (especially Jews) will come to faith. "And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the LORD has said, among the survivors whom the LORD calls" (v.32). Like the "catching up" from 1 Thess 4:17, the DOL wasn't something that the believers wouldn't notice. The purpose of Paul's writing to the church in Thessalonica was to correct this erroneous belief.

Paul continued with a very detailed explanation of the series of events that would lead up to the return of the Lord Jesus to carry away His Church. Paul said that a "man of lawlessness" would be revealed, a future world leader known throughout the Scripture as the "Antichrist." This satanic person would "oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God" (v.4). The lawlessness of this end time will be held back by the power of God until the time that the man of sin is revealed (vv.7-8). The man of sin will be accompanied by "the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders" (v.9). The people that remain on the earth during this time will "refuse to love the truth and so be saved" (v.10b). This leads to a terrible conclusion. "For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be

condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness" (vv. 11-12). The powerful delusion is partly the counterfeit miracles, signs, and wonders brought about through satanic powers that are allowed to rule the earth during this terrible period of time. The satanic deception of the Antichrist, the person known as the False Prophet, and Satan constitute an unholy trinity that will wage war upon the people left on earth during the end times. To read about these three evil personalities read Revelation Chapters 12 and 13.

After the believers in Thessalonica read Paul's prophecy about what would happen around the time of the Lord's return, they would have been comforted to know that they hadn't missed Jesus as they had heard among the rumors that had been circulating. Paul's teaching about the end times helped them to view their suffering in light of the epic battle that would rage in the era when the Lord Jesus really did return. The "battle" though is no battle at all, for "the Lord Jesus will overthrow [him] with the breath of his mouth" (v.8). That shows us the undisputed ruling power of our Lord, which should bring us hope and comfort, just as it did for the Thessalonian Church.

Our take away from this passage is to heed Paul's warning. Don't be deceived – the Day of the Lord is still to come. Therefore, love the truth and let it lead you to safety. Many books have been written on the subject of the end times and we hope that everyone investigates these matters for themselves by carefully reading and studying the Bible. The brief introduction that we gave today perhaps raises more questions than it answered! We will close this brief introduction to *eschatology*, or the study of the things of the end, and move onto the Gospel lesson.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel lesson for today is from Luke Chapter 19. It is essential to survey the context of the verses we are studying today in order to understand the full context and therefore the meaning of the text. If we back up to Luke 18:18 – 27 we found an occasion where Jesus was confronted by a certain person that was both a ruler and chief tax collector. This ruler asked Jesus, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" (v. 18). Jesus explained to him the requirements of the Jewish Law, and then addressed wealth, the particular obstacle to finding God that existed in the ruler's heart. "You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me" (18b). Read the subsequent verses in this section.

23 When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was a man of great wealth. 24 Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! 25 Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." 26 Those who heard this asked, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus replied, "What is impossible with men is possible with God." (Luke 18:23-27).

Jesus mentioned the impossibly of a camel being able to pass through the eye of a needle. Throughout the ages, a story circulated that goes something like this. Somewhere along the wall in Jerusalem there was a gate called the "eye of the needle" which required a man to dismount his animal in order to pass through at night when all of the other gates were closed. As the saying goes,

the existence of this certain gate meant that when Jesus spoke of a camel going through the eye of a needle he was referring to this particular feature in Jerusalem. The legend went on to say that in this Gospel story Jesus wasn't actually saying that it was impossible for a rich man to enter heaven because he was referring to this certain pint-sized entrance along the wall of Jerusalem. What he meant was that for a man to be saved he would have to prostrate himself before God and crawl on his knees in the same way that he could fit through the tiny gate. God does require a humble and prostrate heart in order to come to faith and to a certain extent, this legend is helpful if interpreted that way. Many people have researched this matter and have found that no such gate has ever existed in Jerusalem. Jesus gave an even better explanation of the whole matter in the text itself. Jesus knew that this young man was relying heavily upon his wealth and that it would be very difficult for him to lay it down in order to rely only upon Jesus for salvation. Jesus clarified that it wasn't impossible for rich people to be saved, but this could *only happen through the power of God*.

With this context in mind, let's move onto the Gospel lesson in Luke Chapter 19 in which Jesus encounters an unusual rich man that *does* receive salvation through the power of God. He didn't even have to locate the fictitious "eye of the needle" in Jerusalem!

Gospel Reading:

1 Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. 2 A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. 3 He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. 4 So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. 5 When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." 6 So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. 7 All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a 'sinner.'" 8 But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." 9 Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. 10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." Luke 19:1-10

Zacchaeus' statement about giving away his wealth and repaying those he had cheated provided a glimpse into the true condition of his repentant heart. Jesus, who through the power of the Holy Spirit was able to read people's minds, understood that Zacchaeus truly did turn from pursuing wealth as his god rely upon God for his salvation. With the exhibition of his faith, Zacchaeus revealed that he was saved through belief in God. Jesus said, "Today salvation has come to this house" (v.9b). Once again, we saw that Jesus chose someone to pursue whom everyone in the community knew was a lost sinner, to "save what was lost" (v.10b). As we have pointed out in last week's study notes, good works and intentions do not make us a Christian, they merely reveal the condition of our heart. In this case, Zacchaeus' good works indicated that his heart had truly been changed by God's power.

What does it take for a person with power, privileges and wealth to become a Christian? The story about the Philippian jailor in the Book of Acts helps to shed light on what it takes for a person of authority like Zacchaeus in Luke's Gospel to be saved. In this particular story, the gates of the prison flew open after an earthquake, and the jailor feared for his life because he was responsible for the security of the men inside. If one person escaped, it might mean the death penalty for him. After the jailor awoke from the earthquake, he was sure that the prisoners were gone. Instead, he found Paul and Silas inside. "He then brought them out and asked, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' They replied, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved– you and your household'" (Acts 16:30-31). Rich people and people in positions of authority such as this jailor can have a very difficult time coming to faith in Jesus Christ. However, through the power of God even the hardest hearts can be broken. The conclusion of the story is as follows. "Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had *come to believe in God*— he and his whole family" (Acts 16:32,34 emphasis added). The Philippian jailor was saved in the same way as Zacchaeus, through faith in Jesus Christ by the hearing of the Word of God.

Reflection Questions

1. Paul told the Thessalonians not to be deceived but instead to love the truth that will save them. Read the following list of false beliefs. With which of these false beliefs can you identify? Pick one and then study the corresponding verses such that you understand the corresponding truth.

A. False Belief: All religions lead to God. Anyone that acts according to their conscience, even if they don't trust in Jesus, will go to heaven.

John 3:16-21 NIV 16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. 19 This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. 20 Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. 21 But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."

Acts 4:8-12 NIV 8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people! 9 If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, 10 then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man

stands before you healed. 11 He is "'the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone.' 12 Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

John 14:6 NIV 6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Matthew 13:40-43 NIV 40 "As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. 41 The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. 42 They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 43 Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

Mt 25:41 "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

B. False Belief: God doesn't provide salvation to people who "just" repent and believe, salvation can only come through the authority of the Church.

Luke 23:32-43 NIV 32 Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. 33 When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals– one on his right, the other on his left. 34 Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots. 35 The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One." 36 The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar 37 and said, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself." 38 There was a written notice above him, which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS. 39 One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!" 40 But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? 41 We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." 42 Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." 43 Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."

C. False Belief: I'm basically a good person. If I go to church every Sunday and Holy Day as well as adhere to most of the teachings of the Church, I will go to heaven.

Romans 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

1Corinthians 6:9-11 Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

John 14:6 NIV 6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Acts 4:12 Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

John 3:3 In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."

2. Now that you see these false beliefs contradict the truth, meditate on the following scripture. Then, take some time to talk to God, confess any false beliefs that you may hold, and ask God the Father to help you love the truth.

Romans 10:9-13 NIV 9 That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. 11 As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame." 12 For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile– the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, 13 for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

For Further Study

Sam was a devout Jew who was a gifted piano performer. He was very religious on the outside, however on the inside, his heart was bent on sin and he knew something was terribly wrong. Listen to Sam's compelling story (25 minutes, Words to Live By radio program):

http://words.net/2013/10/25/no-man-in-human-history-ever-said-words-like-that-sams-story/

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 9-25-2016



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **9-25-2016**. This week we examine a reading from Amos and learn about the dangers of luxurious living when it brings people further away from God. In the Gospel reading, we learn from Jesus through the story of Lazarus and the rich man. We see how important it is to trust in the Lord Jesus as the only source of our salvation before we die. Unless we do it while we are still alive it will be too late once we die.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The context of the first reading from Amos is in the Northern Kingdom (Israel) just before the

invasion by the Assyrian Empire that occurred in 722 BC. This was a time of prosperity for the Israelites who had fallen into idolatry and oppression of the poor people among them. Just one verse before the opening of today's reading God warned them about the inevitable invasion that was to come upon them along with their exile to a land "beyond Damascus" (Amos 5:27). In the reading, God continues His warnings to them about the wrath that he was going to allow to come upon them through the reigning Gentile empire to their north. This invasion from enemies in the north prefigures the invasion that will occur in the last days just prior to the return of the Lord Jesus. These final events will culminate in the outpouring of God's wrath upon the unbelieving world after Jesus returns to gather His church. Interestingly, some "pharisaical" people during Amos time were calling for this Day of the Lord to come (Amos 5:18a,b). God responded to their plea by saying that this day of judgment was one of "darkness and not light (Amos 5:18c, 20). He also told them (through Amos) that it is "as if a man fled from a lion and a bear met him, or went into the house and leaned his hand against the wall, and a serpent bit him" (Amos 5:19). During times of oppression of the poor and idolatry, God's judgment is *not* something for which anyone should pray for!

First Reading:

Amos 6:1-7 NAS95 1 Woe to those who are at ease in Zion And to those who feel secure in the mountain of Samaria, The distinguished men of the foremost of nations, To whom the house of Israel comes. 2 Go over to Calneh and look, And go from there to Hamath the great, Then go down to Gath of the Philistines. Are they better than these kingdoms, Or is their territory greater than yours? 3 Do you put off the day of calamity, And would you bring near the seat of violence? 4 Those who recline on beds of ivory And sprawl on their couches, And eat lambs from the flock And calves from the midst of the stall, 5 Who improvise to the sound of the harp, And like David have composed songs for themselves, 6 Who drink wine from sacrificial bowls While they anoint themselves with the finest of oils, Yet they have not grieved over the ruin of Joseph. 7 Therefore, they will now go into exile at the head of the exiles, And the sprawlers' banqueting will pass away.

God warned the Israelites, those Jews of the northern kingdom (v.1, "in the mountain of Samaria") that their self-satisfied living and sense of security was false for they "will now go into exile at the head of the exiles" (v. 7a). God compared them to various Gentile nations whom He had already judged to a certain extent by the prior invasion of the Jewish people into their homelands (v. 2). The mention of the other nations contains a note of sarcasm. The opulent lifestyle of the Israelites (vv. 4-6) would ultimately lead to their downfall.

The people of Amos' day were no different than those who came after them, and those alive today. Jesus gave many warnings to the rich people during His day in order to turn their hearts to God, for example His discourse with the rich young ruler (Luke 18:18 – 27). Riches aren't bad in and of themselves it is the *love of money* that is the root of all kinds of evil (1 Timothy 6:10). In the Gospel reading we will see Jesus teaching on the critical importance of focusing upon God during people's earthly lifetimes because afterwards it is too late to receive forgiveness of their sin. This forgiveness is only available through faith in Jesus Christ while a person is still alive, there is no second chance

to earn a person's way into heaven.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading from 1 Timothy coincidentally picks up just after the verse mentioned above regarding the love money. "For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs" (1 Timothy 6:10). This provides an important context into the teaching that follows.

Second Reading:

1 Timothy 6:11-16 NAS95 11 But flee from these things, you man of God, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness. 12 Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. 13 I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate, 14 that you keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, 15 which He will bring about at the proper time–He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, 16 who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen.

Paul told young Timothy some very important spiritual truths. Instead of focusing upon riches which leads many people to an eternal, spiritual death, believers are to focus upon the attributes of God. This includes things like "righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness" (v. 11). Paul urged believers to live the Christian life seriously as if it were a battle (v. 12). He concluded the reading by reminding believers about the imminent return of the Lord Jesus, the only One who can give eternal life because he alone possesses it (v. 16). God's kingdom is one of light and immortality. In contrast, and as we will see in the Gospel reading, the kingdom of hell is one of darkness and eternal punishment.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

In the Gospel lesson this week we return to Luke chapter 16 and move forward to verses 19-31 in what has been called "The 'parable' of the rich man and Lazarus" by some commentators. However, from all evidences in the text this isn't a parable at all, rather it's a story about a true event in history.

In the text in Luke we covered the past several weeks Jesus addressed his teaching to the group of legalistic Jews known as the Pharisees. Notice that the readings passed over verses 14 to 18. Since it's always important to consider the context of any part of the Bible that we study let me point out some insights from these missing five verses. Luke stated explicitly that the Pharisees were "worshipers of money" and that this group ridiculed Jesus. This prompted Jesus to tell them that they are the ones "who justify themselves before men, but God knows their hearts." He said that what they exalt (money and status among other things) is an abomination in the sight of God. Jesus

used strong words in an attempt to penetrate the hard hearts of the Pharisees. He said something very important which gives us an insight into God's kingdom that we will be discussing later in this Gospel lesson. Jesus said, "The Law and the Prophets were until John, since then the good news of the **kingdom of God** is preached, and everyone forces his way into it." How may someone attempt to "force themselves" into the kingdom of God? The better question would be, "How were the Pharisees attempting to force themselves into the kingdom of God?" Remember that John the Baptist's call was "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" (Matthew 3:20). John's message was one of repentance and belief in the "one who was to come," Jesus. This was a time of transition, from the Old Testament Law to the as yet unseen mystery of the age of grace we now know as the "church age." The Pharisees were not heeding John's call for repentance and were instead attempting to force themselves into the kingdom through the establishment of their own law. This is clear because Jesus went on to say in verse 17, "But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void." Jesus came to fulfill the Old Testament Law and usher in the Kingdom of Heaven.

The Kingdom of Heaven also referred to as the Kingdom of God is referred to many times in the New Testament. In the Gospel of Saint John Jesus addressed Nicodemus the one we know as "Nick at Night" because this interaction was in the evening outside the hearing of the rest of the religious leaders. John 3:3 gives a crucial insight into the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus said, "You must be born from above to enter the Kingdom of Heaven." He then went on to explain to Nicodemus the meaning of the spiritual birth and how this comes about. Jesus said in verse 15, "that whoever believes in him may have eternal life." He continued in verse 16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but has eternal life." Jesus said that we obtain entrance into the kingdom of heaven through belief in Him which results in our second birth, a spiritual birth. We must believe in Jesus in order to cross over from the kingdom of darkness that the Pharisees were in to the Kingdom of God. In summary we see from the teaching of the forerunner John the Baptist the call for repentance and from Jesus the means to find eternal life through being born again (or from above) through the Spirit of God which comes about through belief in Jesus' finished work of atonement for our sins on the cross at Calvary.

Let's read the text and learn what Jesus was teaching the Pharisees about how to obtain eternal life through their entrance into the Kingdom of God.

Gospel Reading:

Luke 16:19-31 NAS95 19 Now there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day. 20 And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, 21 and longing to be fed with the crumbs which were falling from the rich man's table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores. 22 Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. 23 In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom. 24 And he cried out and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.' 25 But

Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony. 26 And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us.' 27 And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father's house– 28 for I have five brothers–in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' 29 But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' 30 But he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!' 31 But he said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.'

Here we see the study of two contrasts, the rich versus poor man in this world, and the kingdom of the dead versus the kingdom of God in the next. The rich man enjoyed God's gracious provisions while he was alive, but after he died he not only didn't have these generous provisions but suffered in torment, while no longer even having a physical body. Yet this man soul still craved for water and for relief from the flames. In life, the rich man was prosperous enough to have a wall around his house which required a gate through which to enter. The walls protected him during his lifetime but after this rich man's life ended his soul was bared naked before God. In contrast, the poor man enjoyed none of the rich man's outlandish provisions while he was living in poverty on the earth. Yet this very same man that spent his years begging outside of the rich man's gate was in the comfort of "Abraham's bosom," a place of peace and security we call heaven. Clearly, Jesus' teaching in this section isn't a parable at all but is instead a rare glimpse into the next world, that shadowy place known in the Bible as Hades. Jesus reveals to us that Hades consists of two regions; one is a place of torment and outside the provision of God, the place that we know as hell. The other region is a place of peace that we know as heaven. Between these two regions is a "great chasm" which separates the two realms. The contrast is between the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of light.

Here is a bit of background that will help to explain the cultural milieu. In that culture a rich person was seen to carry more favor with God than a poor person. This was partly due to the agrarian nature of their society. If a rancher had a herd of cattle and over a period of time doubled the size of his heard he was believed to carry favor with God. This belief came in part because of the conditional nature of the Mosaic Covenant under which the people had been living. Remember that during the period of judges and later during kings the people's prosperity was directly proportional to their obedience with God. When they walked with God He blessed them with material possessions as well as with a certain degree of peace and safety. However, when they walked away from God he removed their material goods as well as their peace and safety. The rich man in this true story told by Jesus had all of the perceived blessings from God during his human life. He enjoyed material possessions (called a rich man and clothed in royal purple and fine linen) and safety (a house surrounded by walls). The Jewish people at this time would have viewed him as a man that carried much favor with God because of God's great provision for him. In contrast, Lazarus had none of these things and lived a miserable life. He would have been perceived as a terrible sinner in this culture. Once both of them died the tables turned upside down. God said in Matthew 20:16, "So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

Look more closely at the text in Luke 16. The rich man is able to communicate directly with Abraham from within his new humble position in Hades, the place of the dead. But he is anything but humble. He is still trying to order people around, even begging them to do his will. Jesus explained that Abraham was "far off." When he spoke to Abraham he asked for mercy though God, the only One that can possible grant mercy, isn't mentioned. Abraham is what is known in literary circles as a "foil." He is present in this story for no other reason than to introduce information which they reader would otherwise have no other way of knowing. Abraham's response to the rich man's request to send Lazarus back from the dead to warn his five brothers about hell is, "They have Moses and the Prophets, let them hear them." The rich man replied that if someone came back from the dead they would not be convinced. This is a remarkable request on the part of the rich man because now he was at the mercy of Lazarus to save his brothers from hell. The Scriptures are clear that when Jesus Himself did return from the dead many of the people did not believe in him.

Stepping back and looking at the audience of the Pharisees, we ask how can a religious person be sent to hell after they die when they truly believe that the merit heaven? This is the key point of today's lesson. The only way a person can merit heaven is through first repenting and then believing that only Jesus merited salvation for them by dying on the cross for their sins. Pharisees in any age are not willing to enter through the narrow door of belief in Jesus, instead they chose their own way and attempt to force their way into the kingdom of heaven. This type of thinking continues in the present day among anyone who believes they deserve heaven because of their good works or church attendance. The predictable end is what we see with the rich man in Hades.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. Based upon what you learned in today's study in Luke, if you were Lazarus and were sent back from heaven to warn your brothers what would you tell them?

2. We saw in the Gospel reading how you can only cross the great chasm between the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of light while you are still alive. You may ask, why hasn't anyone ever told me about this? They have, they're doing it now. Do you believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead and confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord to the Glory of God (Romans 10:9)? We have written a comprehensive analysis of where spiritual life comes from in an article by that name. Read *Where Does Spiritual Life Really Come From* on the Christians for Christ web site.

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/092516.cfm

Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

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

Lectionary: 138

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

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Mass Study Notes for Easter Sunday, 3-27-2016



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **3-27-2016, Easter Sunday**. Happy Easter! 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, "<u>if</u> you have been <u>raised</u> up with Christ. This has a threefold meaning. First, he meant this in the sense that **<u>if</u>** 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/032716.cfm

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Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 3-20-2016



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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **3-20-2016, Easter Sunday**. This week we open the reading with the procession of the palms. Then we move to the first reading that gives us a glimpse of the Suffering Servant, the Messiah. The second reading shows the humility of Jesus, who came to fulfill the Old Testament prophecy of the Messiah having to suffer. Finally, we conclude with the Gospel account of Jesus' passion, our Messiah, Who paid the penalty for our sin.

Reading at the Procession of the Palms

Luke 19:28-40 NAS95 28 After He had said these things, He was going on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. 29 When He approached Bethphage and Bethany, near the mount that is called Olivet, He sent two of the disciples, 30 saying, "Go into the village ahead of you; there, as you enter, you will find a colt tied on which no one yet has ever sat; untie it and bring it here. 31 "If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' you shall say, 'The Lord has need of it.'" 32 So those who were sent went away and found it just as He had told them. 33 As they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, "Why are you untying the colt?" 34 They said, "The Lord has need of it." 35 They brought it to Jesus, and they threw their coats on the colt and put Jesus on it. 36 As He was going, they were spreading their coats on the road. 37 As soon as He was approaching, near the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the miracles which they had seen, 38 shouting: "BLESSED IS THE KING WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD; Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" 39 Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Him, "Teacher, rebuke Your disciples." 40 But Jesus answered, "I tell you, if these become silent, the stones will cry out!"

The time around Passover was a season of messianic expectancy, and there were many pilgrims in the city for the celebration. One of the issues that was fresh in the mind of the people was Jesus' raising of Lazarus from the dead just shortly before this last Passover (John 11:1-45). This would have played into His sudden popularity and for the people's desire to see Him. In messianic form, Jesus directed His disciples with exact precision, and when they followed His orders, everything worked out exactly as Jesus had said. Jesus asserted His authority over Jerusalem by riding into the city on a colt (v. 30, Mark 11:4), not a mighty stallion as would have been done by kings. This was in fulfillment of a prophecy from Zechariah (Zechariah 9:9). Evidently, according to Saint Matthew's narrative, Jesus rode on the colt and the donkey (it's mother) walked alongside.

The procession of the palms dealt with Jesus' first coming. As we look forward to the celebration of Jesus' resurrection on Easter Sunday, let's look briefly at Jesus' second coming. The Book of Revelation revealed some of the details about Jesus' physical return to the earth at the end of the Great Tribulation period. Jesus entered Jerusalem during His First Advent on a donkey. Read what the Scripture says about how He will return the second time.

11 And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war. 12 His eyes are a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems; and He has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself. 13

He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. 14 And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses. 15 From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. 16 And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS." (Revelation 19:11-16).

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 as happened the first time. At His First Coming, many people missed His appearance. According to John, at His Second Coming He will not be missed. John said, "BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen" (Rev 1:7). When the "King of Kings and Lord of Lords" (v.16b) returns, He will come in judgment to a people living "as in the days of Noah" (Matthew 24:37) expecting things to continue as they always have in the past. Since God has given us this warning, we must ask ourselves "How now shall we live?" While ignorance seems to be bliss, it does not lead to eternal life.

This Sunday as we celebrate Jesus' triumphal entrance in Jerusalem at His First Advent, we can celebrate that we are among those that did, in a sense, welcome Jesus to Jerusalem as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. We can celebrate that we are not among those who missed His first coming. As we hold our palms, we can proudly celebrate our belief that King Jesus will one day return to the earth he created. In our waving of the palms, we can lift them up as white flags of surrender to the King who deserves our whole lives.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading after the procession of the palms is from Isaiah 50. The context is just after Isaiah told about how God had disciplined the northern tribes of Israel (Isaiah 50:1-3). We see that God judged Israel's sinfulness, but then also provided a way for salvation in this prediction of the Messiah. The picture painted in the verses leading up to today's reading is one of temporarily setting aside this group of God's chosen people until they come to believe in God's sending of the Messiah. The prophecy shifts to the personalization of the Messiah's suffering, which we will also be reading about in greater detail during the Gospel narrative covering the Passion of Jesus Christ.

First Reading:

Isaiah 50:4-7 NAS95 4 The Lord GOD has given Me the tongue of disciples, That I may know how to sustain the weary one with a word. He awakens Me morning by morning, He awakens My ear to listen as a disciple. 5 The Lord GOD has opened My ear; And I was not disobedient Nor did I turn back. 6 I gave My back to those who strike Me, And My cheeks to those who pluck out the beard; I did not cover My face from humiliation and spitting. 7 For the Lord GOD helps Me, Therefore, I am not disgraced; Therefore, I have set My face like flint, And I know that I will not be ashamed.

In this reading, the Prophet Isaiah speaks of himself as a "type" of Christ. Christ the Messiah has been given the Word of God, something that "sustains a weary one with a word" (v. 4). The Messiah is obedient (v. 5), even giving His back to those who strike Him and His "cheeks to those who pluck out [His] beard" (v. 6). God darkened the skies during the spiritually dark event of Jesus' suffering, and Jesus "set [His] face like flint" and wasn't ashamed (v. 7) to fulfil God's will in giving His life for us. Later in the Gospel lesson, we will read about the fulfillment of the suffering of God's servant (Is. 50:6 "scourged" and "spat upon") in great detail.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The predicted suffering from Isaiah is also the backdrop for the second reading, which was probably sung as a hymn in the early Church about the great lengths that Jesus went to in order to fulfill the Father's plan for our salvation.

Second Reading:

Philippians 2:6-11 NAS95 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. 8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9 For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

This passage continues the sharp contrast that the Bible portrays between Jesus' first Advent and His second coming. The first advent He came as a humble servant. In this act of the incarnation and His death, He not only served His Father, but he served us. Humankind was in desperate need of a Savior, owing a sin debt beyond the ability to repay. So He became the suffering Servant "for the joy set before Him" (Hebrews 12:2), paying our debt on the cross. By being obedient to the Father, He will come again in exaltation and power (as we saw in Revelation earlier). The second coming will be very different from the first Advent. In addition to every eye seeing his second coming, this passage informs us that every knee will bow, voluntarily or involuntarily. The choice is ours to make. We can voluntarily bow our knee to the Messiah now, or we can harden our hearts against Him, only to involuntarily bow when He returns.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel Reading is Luke's account of the passion, which includes the betrayal, arrest, trial, torture, humiliation, crucifixion and burial of Jesus.

Gospel Reading:

Luke 22:14 – 23:56 NAS95 14 When the hour had come, He reclined at the table, and the apostles with Him. 15 And He said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I

suffer; 16 for I say to you, I shall never again eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." 17 And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He said, "Take this and share it among yourselves; 18 for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine from now on until the kingdom of God comes." 19 And when He had taken some bread and given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me." 20 And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood. 21 "But behold, the hand of the one betraying Me is with Mine on the table. 22 "For indeed, the Son of Man is going as it has been determined; but woe to that man by whom He is betrayed!" 23 And they began to discuss among themselves which one of them it might be who was going to do this thing. 24 And there arose also a dispute among them as to which one of them was regarded to be greatest. 25 And He said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called 'Benefactors.' 26 "But it is not this way with you, but the one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant. 27 "For who is greater, the one who reclines at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table? But I am among you as the one who serves. 28 "You are those who have stood by Me in My trials; 29 and just as My Father has granted Me a kingdom, I grant you 30 that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. 31 "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; 32 but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers." 33 But he said to Him, "Lord, with You I am ready to go both to prison and to death!" 34 And He said, "I say to you, Peter, the rooster will not crow today until you have denied three times that you know Me." 35 And He said to them, "When I sent you out without money belt and bag and sandals, you did not lack anything, did you?" They said, "No, nothing." 36 And He said to them, "But now, whoever has a money belt is to take it along, likewise also a bag, and whoever has no sword is to sell his coat and buy one. 37 "For I tell you that this which is written must be fulfilled in Me, 'AND HE WAS NUMBERED WITH TRANSGRESSORS'; for that which refers to Me has its fulfillment." 38 They said, "Lord, look, here are two swords." And He said to them, "It is enough." 39 And He came out and proceeded as was His custom to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples also followed Him. 40 When He arrived at the place, He said to them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation." 41 And He withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and began to pray, 42 saying, "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done." 43 Now an angel from heaven appeared to Him, strengthening Him. 44 And being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground. 45 When He rose from prayer, He came to the disciples and found them sleeping from sorrow, 46 and said to them, "Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not enter into temptation." 47 While He was still speaking, behold, a crowd came, and the one called Judas, one of the twelve, was preceding them; and he approached Jesus to kiss Him. 48 But Jesus said to him, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?" 49 When those who were around Him saw what was going to happen, they said, "Lord, shall we strike with the sword?" 50 And one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. 51 But Jesus answered and said, "Stop! No more of this." And He touched his ear and healed him. 52 Then Jesus said to the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders who had come against Him, "Have you come out with

swords and clubs as you would against a robber? 53 "While I was with you daily in the temple, you did not lay hands on Me; but this hour and the power of darkness are yours." 54 Having arrested Him, they led Him away and brought Him to the house of the high priest; but Peter was following at a distance. 55 After they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter was sitting among them. 56 And a servant-girl, seeing him as he sat in the firelight and looking intently at him, said, "This man was with Him too." 57 But he denied it, saying, "Woman, I do not know Him." 58 A little later, another saw him and said, "You are one of them too!" But Peter said, "Man, I am not!" 59 After about an hour had passed, another man began to insist, saying, "Certainly this man also was with Him, for he is a Galilean too." 60 But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about." Immediately, while he was still speaking, a rooster crowed. 61 The Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had told him, "Before a rooster crows today, you will deny Me three times." 62 And he went out and wept bitterly. 63 Now the men who were holding Jesus in custody were mocking Him and beating Him, 64 and they blindfolded Him and were asking Him, saying, "Prophesy, who is the one who hit You?" 65 And they were saying many other things against Him, blaspheming. 66 When it was day, the Council of elders of the people assembled, both chief priests and scribes, and they led Him away to their council chamber, saying, 67 "If You are the Christ, tell us." But He said to them, "If I tell you, you will not believe; 68 and if I ask a question, you will not answer. 69 "But from now on THE SON OF MAN WILL BE SEATED AT THE RIGHT HAND of the power OF GOD." 70 And they all said, "Are You the Son of God, then?" And He said to them, "Yes, I am." 71 Then they said, "What further need do we have of testimony? For we have heard it ourselves from His own mouth." 1 Then the whole body of them got up and brought Him before Pilate. 2 And they began to accuse Him, saying, "We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, and saying that He Himself is Christ, a King." 3 So Pilate asked Him, saying, "Are You the King of the Jews?" And He answered him and said, "It is as you say." 4 Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, "I find no guilt in this man." 5 But they kept on insisting, saying, "He stirs up the people, teaching all over Judea, starting from Galilee even as far as this place." 6 When Pilate heard it, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. 7 And when he learned that He belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent Him to Herod, who himself also was in Jerusalem at that time. 8 Now Herod was very glad when he saw Jesus; for he had wanted to see Him for a long time, because he had been hearing about Him and was hoping to see some sign performed by Him. 9 And he questioned Him at some length; but He answered him nothing. 10 And the chief priests and the scribes were standing there, accusing Him vehemently. 11 And Herod with his soldiers, after treating Him with contempt and mocking Him, dressed Him in a gorgeous robe and sent Him back to Pilate. 12 Now Herod and Pilate became friends with one another that very day; for before they had been enemies with each other. 13 Pilate summoned the chief priests and the rulers and the people, 14 and said to them, "You brought this man to me as one who incites the people to rebellion, and behold, having examined Him before you, I have found no guilt in this man regarding the charges which you make against Him. 15 "No, nor has Herod, for he sent Him back to us; and behold, nothing deserving death has been done by Him. 16 "Therefore I will punish Him and release Him." 17 Now he was obliged to release to them at the feast one prisoner. 18 But they cried out all together, saying, "Away with this man, and release for us Barabbas!" 19 (He was one who had been thrown into prison for an insurrection made in the city,

and for murder.) 20 Pilate, wanting to release Jesus, addressed them again, 21 but they kept on calling out, saying, "Crucify, crucify Him!" 22 And he said to them the third time, "Why, what evil has this man done? I have found in Him no guilt demanding death; therefore I will punish Him and release Him." 23 But they were insistent, with loud voices asking that He be crucified. And their voices began to prevail. 24 And Pilate pronounced sentence that their demand be granted. 25 And he released the man they were asking for who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, but he delivered Jesus to their will. 26 When they led Him away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, coming in from the country, and placed on him the cross to carry behind Jesus. 27 And following Him was a large crowd of the people, and of women who were mourning and lamenting Him. 28 But Jesus turning to them said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, stop weeping for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. 29 "For behold, the days are coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed.' 30 "Then they will begin TO SAY TO THE MOUNTAINS, 'FALL ON US,' AND TO THE HILLS, 'COVER US.' 31 "For if they do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?" 32 Two others also, who were criminals, were being led away to be put to death with Him. 33 When they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified Him and the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left. 34 But Jesus was saying, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." And they cast lots, dividing up His garments among themselves. 35 And the people stood by, looking on. And even the rulers were sneering at Him, saying, "He saved others; let Him save Himself if this is the Christ of God, His Chosen One." 36 The soldiers also mocked Him, coming up to Him, offering Him sour wine, 37 and saying, "If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself!" 38 Now there was also an inscription above Him, "THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS." 39 One of the criminals who were hanged there was hurling abuse at Him, saying, "Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!" 40 But the other answered, and rebuking him said, "Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? 41 "And we indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." 42 And he was saying, "Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!" 43 And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise." 44 It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour, 45 because the sun was obscured; and the veil of the temple was torn in two. 46 And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, "Father, INTO YOUR HANDS I COMMIT MY SPIRIT." Having said this, He breathed His last. 47 Now when the centurion saw what had happened, he began praising God, saying, "Certainly this man was innocent." 48 And all the crowds who came together for this spectacle, when they observed what had happened, began to return, beating their breasts. 49 And all His acquaintances and the women who accompanied Him from Galilee were standing at a distance, seeing these things. 50 And a man named Joseph, who was a member of the Council, a good and righteous man 51 (he had not consented to their plan and action), a man from Arimathea, a city of the Jews, who was waiting for the kingdom of God; 52 this man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. 53 And he took it down and wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid Him in a tomb cut into the rock, where no one had ever lain. 54 It was the preparation day, and the Sabbath was about to begin. 55 Now the women who had come with Him out of Galilee followed, and saw the tomb and how His body was laid. 56 Then they returned and prepared spices and perfumes. And on the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment.

We read this account of Jesus' crucifixion ever year but sometimes the meaning of it can get lost in the routine. It is important for us to understand the implications of the death of Christ in our own lives. Jesus endured a horrible death for one important reason: to bring sinful human beings back into right relationship with the Father. Saint Paul said, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23) and "For the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23a). Jesus paid the penalty required by the Father for our sin. Saint John said, "and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world" (1 John 2:2). Propitiation is a word that means, "The offering which appeases the wrath of one against whom an offence has been committed" (American Tract Society Dictionary). The appeasement of the Father's wrath through Jesus' death on the cross is God's invitation to you to be in right relationship with Him. While it is a free gift (meaning you don't have to earn it), you do have to unwrap the gift. This means that you have to receive the gift through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. John said, "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).

If you have not received Jesus into your life, you can do that by speaking to Him in prayer. There are not any magic words, just tell God about your belief that Jesus died for your sins. Ask Him to empower you to accomplish His work in your life through the Holy Spirit living in you. If you prayed this prayer, you are entering into a relationship with God the Father through Jesus. As with any relationship, there are certain sensitivities that we extend to the other person. When you find out what the other person values and loves then you cooperate with their plan especially when you know that they have your best interests in mind. That is how it is with God in our relationship with Him. You study the Bible to get to know who He is. You go to church to find more about His heart. You give up destructive habits that lead you away from God. Another important part of relating to God is learning to walk in step with His Spirit. Every believer has been given the gift of the Holy Spirit Who lives inside of us. To walk in step with the Spirit is to cooperate with God on a daily basis. All of these things are how we grow in our relationship with God.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. What is one thing from these readings that helps you to trust in how Jesus is working in your life?

2. How have you personalized the story of Jesus' crucifixion?

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/032016.cfm Palm Sunday

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Mike's Testimony



As a teenager I was a typical small town boy who played football, got low average grades and drank and smoked with my buddies. At the age of 18 as a senior in high school I became interested in a Catholic girl who moved here from another state. As much as I liked her, I was torn. She had taught me about a budget, a checkbook, and actual responsibility. We broke off the relationship because I had other priorities. It wasn't long before I had changed my mind and asked her back. We went on to date over the next five years where we stayed dating through my parents divorce when I was 22. One year later we were married.

To marry her, I needed to go to RCIA and become Catholic which was a way to commit to her. During our dating period my Mom became a Christian by asking God into her heart. It was a little confusing because God wasn't a focus on our lives. We bought our first home in 1992, had our first child in 1993, and completed the family in 1996 with a second boy. My job was great and over the next ten years we had grown into a much larger house, along with a boat, 2 cars, and a camper. I had grown to love the things of the world. Ten years ago our lives all changed when we found out my wife had breast cancer. Trips to the Cleveland Clinic were going to give her the best care she deserved. As we finished the doctor bills kept coming. Work had become stressful and the hospital

debt seemed too much. We continued to raise our family and we got closer to church. An enlightening question from my youngest made it clear where his mind was. "Daddy, is Mom gonna die?" As I think back about seeing my wife having Christmas with us without hair and signs of wear from the chemo, I know how worried he had to be. God helped me answer my little boy. "We're all gonna die buddy" I said with a somber stare.

Life went on and I started to pray. I would ask God to strengthen our family. We continued to church but we didn't address the financial mess we were in. Being turned over to collections led us to bankruptcy, and losing our worldly possessions like the house, the boat, and one of the cars. This took a toll on our family. After the bankruptcy we found an angel of a lady who let us purchase her home on land contract so we moved in around nine years ago. While rebuilding our lives shortly after moving in we got the disturbing news that my wife's cancer returned in her lungs…stage 4. Knowing that there is no stage 5, and that stage 4 was likely incurable I was scared. My wife went through her second round of chemo. We were determined to stay up on the bills this time and we were doing pretty good. One morning in 2013 I was finishing my 40 minute drive to work one morning and I called aa debt collector to arrange a payment that was due and was informed that my credit card had expired and no payments would be accepted. I was being taken to court. I stood outside in the parking lot on the phone and every bit of my past several years of frustration had entered the earpiece of the lady on the phone. I ignored anything I had ever been taught about manners and let her have it. Due to my outrage I had became very dizzy. I made my way into my office where first responders took care of me, where I ended up getting onto a gurney and taken to the hospital. I was diagnosed with a stroke that turned to an anyerism. Through a very rare surgery the doctor was able to stop the bleeding with minimal brain damage. My wife who was carrying around stage 4 cancer found herself by my side praying for me as I spent nearly two months in a coma. Once again my boys were faced with losing a parent. From the hospital I was released to a rehab facility. After three months in this facility I was released to come home with my walker. By this time in the recovery I could feel Gods touch and I would tell my visitors "God is with me, he has sent me an angel". The presence was so powerful I wanted to tell everyone. As I started outpatient rehab and was getting better with the speech therapy I started thinking about going to work. My rehab was going to lead me back to my job in Engineering. I joined back in June of 2014 and my rehab led me to walk in 5k events. In July of 2014 I was getting ready to start a race and found myself standing next to my 8th grade Science teacher and ex high school coach. It was clear that God placed me there as he joined me in my walk around the course. We had an incredible talk and spent more time together throughout the fall. I picked up golf again and we were playing golf together in August. As I shared my new relationship with coach we talked about God. " what does this love I have for God mean?" I asked. He looked at me and asked "Have You Ever Been Saved?" I wasn't sure what he meant so I asked. He rephrased the question; "have you ever asked God into your heart?" I paused because I was a little confused. "I think so" was my meager answer. "Do you want to?" He asked. We were in the cart driving to the green and I said "sure!". He parked the cart and pulled a small bible out of his pocket. He opened the back and started reading some scriptures to me about how God loved us so much, he gave away his only son, who suffered, died, and was buried. His Son Jesus rose from the dead to fulfill the scriptures. "Do you want to pray" he asked as he pointed to the book. I said "sure" and started reading a prayer to God telling him he is my Father

and I believe Jesus died for me and because I am a sinner I am forgiven. With his hand on my shoulder my coach chuckled because he wanted to read it with me and he couldn't find his glasses. I asked "now what?" He said "you will know". " you're going to be put into places and situations God has set for you. I continued to work for four more months and got terminated because I wasn't the same guy. I drove home in pure peace. I was going to be ok. I drove home and took a couple of part time jobs. I was a manager at our local grocery store and worked as care staff for a workshop for disabled adults. That job has impacted my life as I saw people working hard to accomplish daily tasks. Many of them Christian. I sat down and shared my experience by writing a book. The title of the book is "Were All Miracles". As I have been able to share the Miracle God placed upon me to bring me back, we need to reflect and realize we all have been given life and for those who know the Lord, we can live forever. I have been able to share through speaking arrangements as well as ministering to those who I am faced with just as coach said. God is amazing and I was missing out. In less than two years since opening my heart, it has been amazing!

Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 2-28-2016



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **2-28-2016**. Why do bad things happen to "good" people? In the Gospel reading today Jesus addressed a related question posed to Him by the crowd except with a twist. Their question was whether when bad things happened to people were they worse sinners than the ones who avoided the same fate? We will see how Jesus cut to the heart of the matter, the people's universal need for repentance and faith for the forgiveness of sin. This week we also look at a story of Moses in the Book of Exodus and a passage from 1 Corinthians which

relates another story from Exodus.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Book of Exodus. The context of the reading is Moses' calling by God to lead the Hebrews out of their captivity under the Pharaoh. In chapter 1, after the Israelites had settled in Egypt under Joseph's guardianship (in the seven-year famine), "there arose a new king in Egypt who did not know Joseph" (Exodus 1:8). After Moses saw the injustices being done against his people, he killed an Egyptian who was beating a Hebrews (Exodus 2:12). After he fled from the Pharaoh who found out about it, he helped Jethro's daughters water their flock (Exodus 2:17). Afterwards, Jethro, "the priest of Midian," gave his daughter Zipporah to Moses as his wife (v. 21). Thereafter he had his first son Gershom there in the land of Midian during this time of his first "exodus" because of his flight from the Pharaoh. All of this is leading up to today's reading in chapter three which begins the period of time known as "The Exodus" during which Moses under the direction of God led the Hebrew people out of Egypt. In today's reading we see Moses' first recorded experience with a divine revelation from God which happened during his stewardship of his father-in-law's flock.

First Reading:

Note: Verses 8b – 12 that were omitted from the reading have been included below.

Exodus 3:1-15 NAS95 1 Now Moses was pasturing the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian; and he led the flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. 2 The angel of the LORD appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed. 3 So Moses said, "I must turn aside now and see this marvelous sight, why the bush is not burned up." 4 When the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." 5 Then He said, "Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." 6 He said also, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. 7 The LORD said, "I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt, and have given heed to their cry because of their taskmasters, for I am aware of their sufferings. 8 So I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite. 9 Now, behold, the cry of the sons of Israel has come to Me; furthermore, I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians are oppressing them. 10 Therefore, come now, and I will send you to Pharaoh, so that you may bring My people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt." 11 But Moses said to God, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?" 12 And He said, "Certainly I will be with you, and this shall be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God at this

mountain." 13 Then Moses said to God, "Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you.' Now they may say to me, 'What is His name?' What shall I say to them?" 14 God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM"; and He said, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" 15 God, furthermore, said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is My name forever, and this is My memorial-name to all generations.

In the reading, we see Moses receiving direct revelation from God, first in the form of a sign (a bush burning but not consumed) and then in the form of the voice of God calling him by name (v. 4). This was the formal calling of the prophet Moses for the specific purpose of delivering the people from their oppression in Egypt (v. 10). Moses questioned God as to how he, as a humble man, could ever accomplish such a great task (v. 11). In contrast to the proud characteristics often exhibited in leaders such as the Pharaoh, we see in Numbers 12:3 how Moses was called the most humble man on the earth. God answered Moses by giving him a sign, saying that once he led the people out of Egypt that he would worship Him again at this same mountain (v. 12). Again, Moses questioned God asking what he should tell his people about the Person from whom he received his commission to deliver them from their oppression. God answered, ""I AM WHO I AM" (v. 14) and to tell them that "I AM has sent me to you" (v. 14). Finally, God connected His "I AM" name, the self-existent One, to the lineage of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (v. 15). In addition to the introduction of the "I AM" designation for God, in verse 2 we also see the use of the word "LORD." This word when used in all capitals denotes the Hebrew word (without vowels) "YHWH," the "tetragrammaton," often translated Yahweh. The first occurrence of this word is found back in Geneses 2:4 and then in 15:6 in which it says about Abraham, "And he believed the LORD and it was counted to him for righteousness." "YHWH" is a reflection of God's divine being, His self-existent nature, something made clear in His words to Moses. This bounding of the reading by opening and closing it with the word "LORD" (v. 2, 15) and the introduction of the heretofore unknown name for God of "I Am" indicates a very strong expression of the sovereignty of God in directing the affairs of Moses to accomplish God's purposes. Moses was to be God's chosen agent to affect the freeing of the Hebrew Nation, the one through whom God would pour pronouncements of blessings to those who obey and curses for those who didn't.

There is plenty that we can we learn from the reading that we can apply to our lives. God works through the lives of frail, imperfect people, like Moses. Although Moses sinned in the killing of the Egyptian (Exodus 2:12) God used him in spite of his sin. If God can use a humble man like Moses to accomplish His purposes, we should assume that God would use ordinary people like ourselves in working out His plan. Second, when God places a specific calling upon our life He expects our obedience, but it's okay to seek answers to our questions. In our day and age, we can seek guidance from a variety of sources when we sense that God has placed a specific calling upon our lives. These include direct statements from Scripture, principles from Scripture, counsel from godly people (especially those with whom we collaborate in praying), and sensing the circumstances that God has placed in our lives. In the reading, we saw how God used Moses' circumstances to lead him to the

exact spot to which he needed to be.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

In this reading, Paul sheds light on these allusions from Israel's past for those of us who are reading this as Gentiles, without the history of the Jewish people as our backdrop. He gave an explanation about the water, manna, and the people's unbelief using a quote from the Old Testament Book of Exodus from which we read in the first reading. Paul's readers would have been familiar with the Old Testament events surrounding the Exodus. Keep in mind the context of chapter 10 in that it follows Paul's explanation of the legitimacy of his apostleship, having just confronted the Corinthians over a very serious matter of sin in their church (see 1 Corinthians 5:1).

Some background on the manna is helpful to understand the big picture and the application to Jesus Christ. The word "manna" in Hebrew means "what is it." As you can imagine, this was an extraordinary way for God to provide for His people. God seems to work in very unexpected ways. In the desert, the Hebrews collected the manna for the first five days of the week that then went bad overnight. However, on the sixth day God provided a double amount of a special type that was preserved for a two-day period in order to provide for a Sabbath rest day. In the spiritual sense Jesus is our special manna, the one who provides our eternal Sabbath rest (Hebrews 4). Yet, like us, the people God led out from among slavery during the Exodus sinned. Yet, this wasn't an isolated instance of grumbling. It says in Exodus, "The whole congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness" (Exodus 16:2). In spite of their hard hearts, God heard the people and answered by telling Moses that He would "rain bread from heaven for you" even in the case when they did not obey Him (Exodus 16:4), which He knew they wouldn't. Moses explained to them that their complaints weren't against him but against God (Exodus 16:8). God made a special provision to provide for the Sabbath by making the manna quantitatively different (a double portion) on the day before as well as qualitatively different – it would not spoil during the Sabbath rest day. God then announced the miracle to Moses through the appearance of the Shekinah glory, which the people saw (Exodus 16:10, c.f.). In the meantime, in the evening before the raining of the manna from the sky began, God sent quail to the people (Exodus 16:13). The text concluded with the people seeing the manna and not recognizing what it was until Moses explained it to them (Exodus 16:15).

Second Reading:

Note: Verses 7 – 9 that were omitted from the reading are included below.

1 Corinthians 10:1-12 NAS95 1 For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; 2 and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; 3 and all ate the same spiritual food; 4 and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ. 5 Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness. 6 Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved. 7 Do

not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, "THE PEOPLE SAT DOWN TO EAT AND DRINK, AND STOOD UP TO PLAY." 8 Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day. 9 Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents. 10 Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. 11 Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. 12 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.

Paul wanted New Testament believers to understand the spiritual heritage and to learn from the mistakes that led to disbelief and rejection of God's provision for their lives. Had the people not been so hard hearted they could have better understood God's provision through the spiritual "manna" that was Christ (v. 4). Yet the Hebrew people in the desert continued to sin, and the sin had dire consequences for them. The heart of the matter was this. "Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall" (vv. 11-12).

There are many spiritual parallels in this reading between the provision of God through the manna and the person and work of Jesus Christ who, called Himself "the bread of life" (John 6:35). In spite of the fact that the people grumbled against God He still provided food for them. The parallel in the New Testament is that in spite of the fact that most of the people didn't accept Jesus as their Messiah, God still provided salvation through Him. The manna was a very unique provision that was done only by God and could not come about by any natural means. In the same way, Jesus was God's supernatural provision and also did not come about by natural means but was instead born through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Another point in the reading concerns Paul's use of the term "spiritual rock" (v. 4). When Paul said "they were drinking from the spiritual rock" and "the rock was Christ" (v. 4) both times he used the word "petra." Jesus was the foundation stone, the One Who provided sustenance to the Hebrews escaping from the Pharaoh during the Exodus. Jesus Himself explained the necessity of a sure foundation in Luke Chapter 6. " Everyone who comes to Me and hears My words and acts on them, I will show you whom he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid a foundation on the rock; and when a flood occurred, the torrent burst against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the one who has heard and has not acted accordingly, is like a man who built a house on the ground without any foundation; and the torrent burst against it and immediately it collapsed, and the ruin of that house was great" (Luke 6:47-49).

Finally, Paul stated, "*these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. 12 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall*" (vv. 11 – 12). The meaning of this is self-evident. We should take great pains to 1. Become familiar with Scripture so that we even have the principles to apply, and 2. Actually, apply them to our lives by learning from those that went before us. Why do we continue to sin when we know so much? Perhaps a better question is, why does God continue to use sinners like us? We know that He does, but this doesn't lessen the call of holiness that God has placed upon our

lives.

As we transition to the Gospel lesson, we will learn about the ultimate consequence of the unforgivable sin, the forsaking of repentance of sin and belief in the forgiveness offered only through faith in Jesus Christ.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading is chapter 13 of Saint Luke. The context is after Jesus' long discourse on the truths of the good news of the Gospel in contrast to the heresies and legalism taught by His antagonists the Pharisees. Jesus told them to "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy" (Luke 12:1b). The Pharisees thought that they had contrived the secret code for living a faith-filled life, which at its root was hypocrisy (Luke 12:1). In contrast to the Pharisees' law code derived in secret, Jesus taught publicly. Jesus said, "But there is nothing covered up that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known" (Luke 12:2). He told them not to fear those that could kill their bodies (i.e. the Pharisees), but to fear the One that could after they were killed cast them into hell (i.e. God). They were not to fear the Pharisees and their hypocritical legal code, a portion of which we will see in today's reading.

Gospel Reading:

Luke 13:1-9 NAS95 1 Now on the same occasion there were some present who reported to Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. 2 And Jesus said to them, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans because they suffered this fate? 3 "I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. 4 "Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them were worse culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem? 5 "I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." 6 And He began telling this parable: "A man had a fig tree which had been planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and did not find any. 7 "And he said to the vineyard-keeper, 'Behold, for three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree without finding any. Cut it down! Why does it even use up the ground?' 8 "And he answered and said to him, 'Let it alone, sir, for this year too, until I dig around it and put in fertilizer; 9 and if it bears fruit next year, fine; but if not, cut it down.'"

Jesus confronted the people's false doctrine that bad things happened to bad people because of their sin. He did this by giving them the truth of the Gospel. The big idea in the reading is that the people whom the tower fell weren't worse sinners, but that **everyone** was in need of repentance and finding faith in Jesus Christ as the only means of forgiveness for their sin. Jesus told them, "unless you repent, you will all likewise perish," (v. 3), meaning spiritual not physical death. Scripture tells us, "it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). Jesus was clear that He was the only way to God, and He said this using the same language about Himself that we saw in the first reading, meaning Jesus is God. He said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6). Jesus closed the reading by revealing God's

patience in waiting for His people to bear fruit, meaning to repent of their sin and come to the knowledge of eternal life (vv. 6 – 8). Scripture tells us that "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). Although there may be points of light in all religions, the only way to God is through faith in Jesus Christ – exclusively by becoming a Christian. This may not jive with the politically correct culture in which we find ourselves today, but the fact remains that this is the truth of God.

We shouldn't dismiss the fact that God judges sin, whether it's in the life of a believer or a non-believer. In our day, God operates according to the New Covenant in which he prunes believers during their earthly lives (John 15:2) while storing up His judgement for unbelievers largely until the end of their lives (John 15:6, "cast in the fire and burned"). Even during the Old Testament times, God revealed His grace for the unbelieving world by lavishing His material blessings upon them, although their eternal destination was hell. This is very clear from both Psalm 37 and Psalm 73. God calls us to remember those who went before us, such as the story of Ananias and Sapphira in the Book of Acts (Acts 5:1-11), or Paul's teaching about some being sick and some have died because of their unholy behavior in the love feast and communion meal (1 Corinthians 11:30). A key point that we need to see is that there are consequences for sin, but not in perhaps the ways we can imagine or according to the ways the people (including the Pharisees addressed in the adjacent verses) contrived.

As Christians just because we do everything right doesn't mean that we will be blessed in the earthly sense in which we might expect, including material blessings and protection from sudden death. Instead, God allows challenges in our lives to lead us to a fuller relationship with Him including the death of loved ones (our ourselves) in order to accomplish His purposes. Our Christian lives are not like baking a cake. We can't just put together the exact right ingredients using a measured formula and follow the recipe exactly and have the cake turn out perfectly well each and every time. Sometimes God throws a monkey wrench into our plans in order to achieve His purposes. What's more, we may not even know or understand these purposes during out natural lifetimes. Unlike the Pharisees who taught salvation by works and outward obedience to their own set of laws, God calls us to walk in faith alone while behaving in ways as directed by the Holy Spirit. This does include closely understanding the biblical principles taught in the New Testament and the Ten Commandments of the Old. However, we should not live our lives formulaically, doing things for God and expecting Him to "bless" us on our terms. He will surely bless us, but His definition of blessing is a lot broader than our limited perspective. May we learn to walk by faith and not our feelings or our sight.

Many of us have had nice young men dressed in white shirts wearing nametags and backpacks knock on our door. The Mormons, although very well intentioned, teach a doctrine similar to that confronted by Jesus in the Gospel reading today. Would you recognize false doctrine when it knocked on your door? As we ponder what Jesus said about those that perish, we have to remember that we are not just talking about the false doctrine of Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses and Muslims, but anyone who holds the doctrine that good works cause salvation rather than flow from it

(Ephesians 2:8-9). Jesus taught us not that we shouldn't judge but rather than when we do judge we are to use a righteous standard (John 7:24, Matthew 7:2). Jesus was clear that belief in Him is the only way to God, and that many would not travel this road. Less we think that those in our community are immune, we can say that many who claim Christianity truly live as practical atheists except they go to church on Sunday while negating Christian principles and practices during the week including prayer, fellowship with other Christians, study Scripture, following God's calling for them (Ephesians 2:10). Jesus told this group, "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles? And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS'" (Matthew 7:21-23).

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. We saw in the Gospel reading how Jesus upended the people's beliefs about sin and salvation. How can you be part of bringing a message of hope and light to people who are approaching God with an expectation of God being a genie on demand (and often being disillusioned with God's unexpected ways of interacting with them)? Are there areas of your own life that you need to work through disillusionment with the Lord's unexpected ways so that you can be freed up to minister to others authentically in their own struggles with surrendering to God?

2. The "bigger" idea in the Gospel reading is evangelism, reaching out to those trapped in false belief systems with the truth of the Gospel. What are two practical ways in which you can begin to reach out to those holding false beliefs? If you pray for God to change a person's heart (an important first step), will you be confident in how you speak to them about Jesus? What verses will you have them read in order to begin to show them the truth of the Gospel?

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/022816-third-sunday-lent.cfm

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 2-14-2016



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **2-14-2016**. This week we examine the first fruits offering found in Deuteronomy 26. Then we see how Saint Paul described the necessity for a person to receive God's free gift of salvation and examine this matter more closely. We conclude this week's study with the Gospel reading in which we see the temptation of Jesus Christ and how this applies to our lives.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Book of Deuteronomy, a word that means "second law." This Book is a retelling, but with many additional details, of the Exodus from Egypt as well as the Law given to Moses. The context of the reading is provided in the first three verses that were omitted from the reading but are shown below.

Deuteronomy 26:1-3 NAS95 1 Then it shall be, when you enter the land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance, and you possess it and live in it, 2 that you shall take some of the first of all the produce of the ground which you bring in from your land that the LORD your God gives you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place where the LORD your God chooses to establish His name. 3 You shall go to the priest who is in office at that time and say to him, 'I declare this day to the LORD my God that I have entered the land which the LORD swore to our fathers to give us.'

Chapter 26 opens with Moses looking forward to when the Israelites enter the Promised Land. God tells them through Moses the laws about the first fruits offering. Each household was to prepare a gift of the best of the land before they utilized any of the harvests from the place in which they were

about to enter. As you read, imagine presenting your "first fruits" offerings to the Old Testament priests after you had entered your new homeland.

First Reading:

Deuteronomy 26:4-10 NAS95 4 "Then the priest shall take the basket from your hand and set it down before the altar of the LORD your God. 5 "You shall answer and say before the LORD your God, 'My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down to Egypt and sojourned there, few in number; but there he became a great, mighty and populous nation. 6 'And the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, and imposed hard labor on us. 7 'Then we cried to the LORD, the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice and saw our affliction and our toil and our oppression; 8 and the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and with great terror and with signs and wonders; 9 and He has brought us to this place and has given us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. 10 'Now behold, I have brought the first of the produce of the ground which You, O LORD have given me.' And you shall set it down before the LORD your God, and worship before the LORD your God;

The reading provides the law of the first fruits offering. The "father" mentioned in verse 5 is Jacob, the father of Israel. After Joseph was appointed a leader in the Egyptian nation, Jacob and his family moved to Egypt because of the drought in the land of Canaan. The future generations then spent four hundred years in Egypt until "a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph" (Exodus 1:8). At this point, God appointed Moses to lead the people out of Egypt into the Promised Land. The first fruits offering was to be made as an offering to God in remembrance of their deliverance from Egyptian captivity. Second, it was to recognize the principle of giving to God first. By assuming this practice once, the people were settled in the Land and they would remember God's miraculous provision to them.

A similar offering first occurs in the Bible in Genesis chapter 4 when Cain and Abel brought their offerings to God. "So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the LORD of the fruit of the ground. Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions" (Genesis 4:3-4a). The reading continues, which makes an important point about how each man made the offering and therefore how God received them. "And the LORD had regard for Abel and for his offering; but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard. So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell" (vv. 4b – 5). Although both Cain and Abel made their offerings directly to God, God honored only Abel's offering. Why? The answer is found in the following New Testament verses. "By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks" (Hebrews 11:4). "[W]e should love one another, not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous" (1 John 3:11–12). God accepted Abel's offering because it was done with love and faith, whereas Cain's offering came from his evil heart. Likely, Cain's offering wasn't the best of the land, but was rather something rather worthless that he had held back for God while keeping the best for

himself.

The offering record in today's reading was during the time known as the theocratic kingdom where the priests were interceding for the people as intermediators with God. This is important to remember because of the great contrast with which we make our offerings in the church today. After Jesus rose from the dead, we see how the priestly class passed away and how Jesus is the only mediator between God and man (1 Timothy 2:5). Now each believer comes to God only through Jesus without the priestly intermediaries. Although in the Old Testament the priestly class prefigured the coming High Priest Jesus, they were subject to the human limitations common to people (Hebrews 7:28) and succumbed to this temptation. In contrast, our perfect High Priest Jesus was subject to temptations but was without sin (Hebrews 4:15). Therefore, the Old Testament priests never offered a perfect sacrifice to God regardless of their noble intentions while Jesus offered the perfect sacrifice for sin forever (Hebrews 10:14).

In this reading, God provided the law of the first fruits offering. Looking forward to the church age, this offering pointed the way towards how Christians offer their own "first fruits" to God in the things they do. By first taking the best that God has given us off the top, we remember how God provided it for us in the first place. We may find ourselves tempted to hold back in our offerings to God. Later in the Gospel reading, we will see the big idea is the temptation of Christ, the application of which is that we too are subject to temptation. As Christians, God has given us wisdom from His word for successfully resisting temptation. However, this assumes that we are a Christian as defined in Scripture. In the second reading, we will see how becoming a Christian requires a person's heartfelt commitment to Jesus Christ. Although salvation is a free gift from God (Ephesians 2:8-9), God word says that there is a transaction that has to occur during the process of accepting this free gift.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The reading is from Saint Paul's Letter to the Romans. In the reading, we will see how Paul quoted from the Book of Deuteronomy as well as the Prophet Joel.

Second Reading:

Romans 10:8-13 NAS95 8 But what does it say? "THE WORD IS NEAR YOU, in your mouth and in your heart" –that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, 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."

The only way to understand this reading is to set it within the context of salvation in general which we will explain first, and then we will return to an analysis of the reading. In these verses, Saint Paul

describes how a person must receive the gift of salvation from God. When someone is given something, they must first receive it. The prerequisite to receiving this gift is to first understand that all of us are without excuse before God and in need of a Savior. Paul said earlier in Romans 3, "For all have sinned and fallen short or the glory of God." The penalty for our sin is eternal separation from God as Paul said in Romans, but God has provided a way out of this horrible situation. "For the wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). God said, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). Our "good" works, no matter how we define them or how hard we work at them, will never result in earning our way to heaven. In order to earn our way to heaven we would have to be perfect, and we see from the Scripture that we are not.

Jesus explained to Nicodemus how one must be "born from above," or "born again," as the Greek word used has two meanings. Jesus said, "You must be born from above to enter the kingdom of heaven" (John 3:3). Nicodemus, a teacher of the Law, didn't understand so Jesus explained it to him. Jesus said:

13 No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man. 14 As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; 15 so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life. 16 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. 17 For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. 18 He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. (John 3:13-18)

Jesus explained to Nicodemus that salvation came through His dying for him and that this comes through faith. Jesus also explained that if someone didn't believe, then by default they have already been judged (v. 18). Saint John further explained salvation in his first Letter, "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him" (1John 5:1). Later he explained, "These things I have written to you **who believe in the name of the Son of God**, so that you may know that you have eternal life" (v. 13, emphasis added). The way in which a person is made right with God is through belief in the finished work of the Son Jesus Christ.

Returning to the reading, Saint Paul described how a person must receive the free gift of eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ. He 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; 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" (Romans 10:9-11). Paul quoted from Deuteronomy in verse 8, which was part of Moses' message to the Israelites before they entered the Promised Land. He explained to them how the words of the Law were in the midst of them because it had been explained to them in detail. They couldn't deny that they knew it when God punished them for breaking it. Finally, Paul quoted from the Prophet Joel a universal message from God, "Whoever will call upon the name of the LORD will be saved" (v. 13).

Having an understanding of Paul's message of salvation is crucial not only because it is the only way to gain eternal life! Our good works will not, and cannot ever merit salvation for ourselves. As we conclude this week's study we will see how being a Christian helps us to overcome temptations common to everyone. While unbelievers have little chance of resisting, believers have been given the power to achieve victory over temptation through resting in God.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading is from Luke 4 in which we see the 40-day period in which God allowed the testing of Jesus in the desert (wilderness) area of Israel.

Gospel Reading:

Luke 4:1-13 NAS95 1 Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led around by the Spirit in the wilderness 2 for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And He ate nothing during those days, and when they had ended, He became hungry. 3 And the devil said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." 4 And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE.'" 5 And he led Him up and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. 6 And the devil said to Him, "I will give You all this domain and its glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. 7 "Therefore if You worship before me, it shall all be Yours." 8 Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD AND SERVE HIM ONLY.'" 9 And he led Him to Jerusalem and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here; 10 for it is written, 'HE WILL COMMAND HIS ANGELS CONCERNING YOU TO GUARD YOU,' 11 and, 'ON their HANDS THEY WILL BEAR YOU UP, SO THAT YOU WILL NOT STRIKE YOUR FOOT AGAINST A STONE.'" 12 And Jesus answered and said to him, "It is said, 'YOU SHALL NOT PUT THE LORD YOUR GOD TO THE TEST.'" 13 When the devil had finished every temptation, he left Him until an opportune time.

We see in verse one that God allowed the temptation of Jesus, and in verse two that the source of it was Satan. The mystery here is that although Jesus is fully God, He also took on human form that was subject to temptation (Philippians 2:7). We are not told the details of the testing that Satan brought to Jesus during this period, but Scripture says that he "was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). Not surprisingly after such a long period without food, the devil tempted Jesus by asking Him to turn the stones into bread. Likely this was in an area in which the stones were shaped like loaves. However, Jesus responded to this and all of the temptations of the devil by quoting Scripture. He pointed out that His purpose eclipsed the needs of satisfying His body's needs, which was one purpose of the fast in the first place. The next temptation showed Jesus the truth that the earth was the devil's kingdom, at least for a short time (2 Corinthians 4:4, the "God of this age."). The devil's offer was legitimate, however Jesus answered him by quoting the scriptural truth that worship belongs only to God, the First Commandment (Deuteronomy 10:20, Exodus 20:3). Finally, the devil tempted Jesus by attempting to make Him place the Lord God to the test, something to which Jesus immediately responded from the Law (Deuteronomy 6:16).

What can we learn from how Jesus faced temptation and from other verses in the Bible on this subject? The following is a series of points about the source of temptation and how a believer can choose to resist through power given to them by God.

- James 1:13-14 "13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. 14 But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust."
  God is never the source of temptation, instead the source of it is our own lust.
- 1Pe 4:12 "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;"
  As believers we should expect trials and temptation to come upon us. God allows these things in order for us to grow closer to Him and through our growing learning how to trust in Him regardless of the circumstances.
- 2Co 12:7 "Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me–to keep me from exalting myself!"
  Even the greatest saints such as Paul were subject to terrible trials and temptations. We as saints of God should also expect temptation.
- Lu 13:4-4 "4 Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them were worse culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem? 5 I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."
  Temptation that comes upon a person isn't because of their sin (although sin can multiply temptation).
- Jude 9 "But Michael the archangel, when he disputed with the devil and argued about the body of Moses, did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, 'The Lord rebuke you!'"
  We are to look to Jesus' example when we are facing temptation by leaning upon the Scripture that we have memorized and placed in our heart. We saw Jesus' example in the Gospel reading today.
- Lu 22:40 "When He arrived at the place, He said to them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation."
  Jesus warned His disciples on the night He was betrayed to pray **before** temptation came upon them. We are to pray in advance of temptation for God to deliver **from** (prevent it from happening) and **through** it (help us when it does come, which it will).
- 2Pe 2:9 "then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment"
  Since God knows we are to ask Him for help.
- 1Co 10:13 "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it."

God has given us tools to resist temptation as we grow in our understanding and reliance upon the Word of God. As you can see from the verses above, resistance to the trials and temptations that we

will encounter as Christians needs to begin well in advance of the actual situation. As you contemplate your response to the next temptation comes along, pray quickly to God for the power to resist. After the event, look back and see how holding to God's Word delivered you. If you failed, discuss this with another Christian whom you trust. Pray together with them and develop some practical methods to resist based upon the Scriptures.

One technique that has proven helpful in increasing our awareness about imminent temptation is the acronym H-A-L-T. This reminds us to be on the lookup for temptation when we are: **H**ungry, **A**ngry, **L**onely or **T**ired. Perhaps you will find yourself resting in God's Word to HALT temptation before you fall prey to it.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. In the first reading, we learned about the law of the first fruits offering. Today, giving includes not only our monetary gifts to our church and charities but also the ways in which we serve the Lord. In your life, in what ways do you bring your very best, like Abel, or hold back, like Cain, in your offerings to God?

2. From what you learned today, why is it important to memorize Scripture? Would you establish a plan to memorize the verses on temptation?

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/021416.cfm

Source(s):

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

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Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 10-25-2015

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **10-25-2015**. This week we open with a message of hope from the Prophet Jeremiah. The application is that although we as believers sin God will ultimately fulfill all of His promises to us including restoration and life with Him in a perfect kingdom. In the second reading from Hebrews, we examine Jesus' intercession for us as our eternal High Priest. We conclude the lesson with Mark's story about Jesus' healing of a blind man named Bartimaeus.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from chapter 31 of the Book of Jeremiah. In Books like Jeremiah that combine history and prophecy, understanding the context is crucial to interpreting the text. In the reading Jeremiah finds himself in the midst of the aftermath of the first two exiles of the people of Judah to Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar. The third and final deportation and destruction of Jerusalem is on the near horizon at which time Jeremiah will find himself carried to Babylon with an intermediate stop along the way in Egypt. In the first and second deportations in 605 and 597 BC, the prophets Daniel and Ezekiel respectively were carried to Babylon to continue their prophetic writings from that far away country. Two chapters before today's reading Jeremiah brought a message of hope to the two previously exiled groups from Judah (the Southern Kingdom) in Babylon. God's instructions to the people through Jeremiah were to live normally and fruitfully in that distant land. They were to "Build houses and live in them; and plant gardens and eat their produce" and "Take wives and become the fathers of sons and daughters, and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; and multiply there and do not decrease" (Jeremiah 29:5.6). The Jews living as exiles in Babylon were to "Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf; for in its welfare you will have welfare" (v. 7).

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First Reading:

Jeremiah 31:7-9 NAS95 7 For thus says the LORD, "Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob, And shout among the chief of the nations; Proclaim, give praise and say, 'O LORD, save Your people, The remnant of Israel.' 8 "Behold, I am bringing them from the north country, And I will gather them from the remote parts of the earth, Among them the blind and the lame, The woman with child and she who is in labor with child, together; A great company, they will return here. 9 "With weeping they will come, And by supplication I will lead them; I will make them walk by streams of waters, On a straight path in which they will not stumble; For I am a father to Israel, And Ephraim is My firstborn."

Jeremiah spoke as God's anointed prophet to the southern tribes of Judah and therefore the reading begins with, "For thus says the LORD" (v. 7a). God had warned the people over and over again that unless they repented He would send them into captivity to atone for their sin. This message of hope was important to the exiles but Jeremiah continued his warnings to Judah that unless they repented God would take the rest of the people captive and destroy the city of Jerusalem along with the temple. The message in today's reading is one of hope to all of the exiles that God would one day restore them back to the land. It also provides hope to the exiles of the Northern Kingdom taken back in 722 BC by the Assyrians, although the message was written to Judah. The reading continues Jeremiah's proclamation about this future restoration. Just prior to this Jeremiah told the people, "For behold, days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'when I will restore the fortunes of My people Israel and Judah.' The LORD says, 'I will also bring them back to the land that I gave to their forefathers and they shall possess it.'" (Jeremiah 30:3). Although the third and final exile had not yet happened, this message of hope was written to all of the exiles, as it was a foregone conclusion.

Jeremiah's message concerned hope in the future restoration of the people of Judah to the land. He said that the people "gather[ed] from the remote parts of the earth . . . A great company, they will return here" (v. 7). Although King Nebuchadnezzar had already deported two large groups from Judah to Babylon, the final destruction was due to come very soon with the siege of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple. Interestingly, God included the Northern Kingdom in this message about the future regathering and restoration of the Israelite people by mentioning "Ephraim is My firstborn" (v. 9). The Prophet Daniel, who was the first to be exiled to Babylon, said concerning the Southern Kingdom that the period of time which they would be held captive after this final event would be seventy years (Daniel 9:24). After these "seventy sevens" of years, Daniel said that a decree would be issued and that Jerusalem would be rebuilt and restored (Daniel 9:25). Jeremiah said the same thing just two chapters before the reading. "When seventy years have been completed for Babylon, I will visit you and fulfill My good word to you, to bring you back to this place" (Jeremiah 29:10). Ultimately, with the mention of Ephraim and a universal regathering of the Jews we must look to the future restoration of the entire kingdom of Israel under the reign of Jesus Christ that will happen upon His return. The big idea is that although the people had sinned, God would forgive their sin and complete the promises that He had made to them to inherit all of the Promised Land. The terms of His promises to them were confirmed in the various covenants. Although many of God's promises to Israel were tied to their inheritance of material blessings such as the land, the

Bible is full of spiritual promises to them including salvation through their future Savior.

The application of Jeremiah's message for us today is that although "all of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23)," "if confess our sins God is faithful and just to forgive our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). We, like the Jews, continually miss the mark. We share in the message of hope that God will complete all of the promises that He has made to us. We cannot make the mistake as some have done by claiming the church has replaced Israel and that since God has forsaken Israel the church will inherit the promises that God made to them. Instead, God will make good both on His promises to Israel and on the promises He made to the church. *For more about God's promises to the church refer to the first study question.*

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from Chapter 5 of the Book of Hebrews. The overall message of the Book is the contrast between the Old and New Covenants. The Old Covenant was incomplete and imperfect in the sense that it came through the Levitical priesthood that was passing away because of its connection to mortal high priests. In contrast, the New Covenant is proffered through the eternal priesthood of Jesus Christ who is in the line of Melchizedek. This theme comes out very clearly in today's reading.

Second Reading:

Hebrews 5:1-6 NAS95 1 For every high priest taken from among men is appointed on behalf of men in things pertaining to God, in order to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins; 2 he can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness; 3 and because of it he is obligated to offer sacrifices for sins, as for the people, so also for himself. 4 And no one takes the honor to himself, but receives it when he is called by God, even as Aaron was. 5 So also Christ did not glorify Himself so as to become a high priest, but He who said to Him, "YOU ARE MY SON, TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU"; 6 just as He says also in another passage, "YOU ARE A PRIEST FOREVER ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK."

The author explained how God in the Old Testament appointed the mortal, weak and misguided high priests of the Levitical line (Aaron) in order not only to offer sacrifices for other people but also for themselves (v. 3). In contrast, God the Father appointed Christ as our eternal High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek, not Aaron (v. 6). It's important to understand the [KS1] man named Melchizedek mentioned in verse 5. The first time we find Melchizedek in the Bible is in Genesis 14:17-20 where we find him bringing out bread and wine to greet Abraham who was returning from battle with the forces that kidnapped his nephew Lot. Hebrews 7:1 says about this, "Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham as he was returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him." Looking at the book of Hebrews as a whole you can see that it's grounded in an explanation of Christ through the perspective of the Levitical Old Testament priesthood, thus the title given to the book "Hebrews" meaning Jews (see Genesis 14:3 where Abram, later called Abraham, the father of the Jews, is called a Hebrew). We see there in Hebrews

7:1 that Melchizedek is three things: 1. the king of Salem, the area we now identify as Jerusalem, 2. A priest of the "Most High God," meaning a priest of the *only* true God, and 3. one to whom Abraham the father of the Jews gave tribute. Today's reading said that Christ is of the "order of Melchizedek (v. 5), which is a quote from Psalms 110:4. According to the Book of Leviticus, all of the Old Testament Priests had to come from the tribe of Levi, but Melchizedek was a priest before the Law even existed! Yet Abraham gave a tenth portion (or tithe) to Melchizedek (Hebrews 7:4) as required under the later Law for all priests (verse 5). What is being explained here is that Melchizedek was one of a class of priests that foreshadowed the coming final, eternal High Priest, Jesus. Melchizedek, whose name means King of righteousness, could not have come from the line of Aaron (Levi) or Judah, because these did not exist during his lifetime. Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament sacrificial system, the final sacrifice was Jesus' own death on the cross which did away with the Levitical priesthood (Hebrews 10:11-14). Jesus was from the "order of Melchizedek" (Ps 110:4, Hebrews 7:17), not the line of Aaron. This is new order is made even more clear by reading beyond the quoted section of Psalm 110 to verse 7, "Therefore He will lift up his head." This eternal priest Jesus of the non-priestly line of Judah is and will be exalted by God. Melchizedek was the first biblical personality to picture the reality of a priest/king.

There are numerous implications for our lives relative to Jesus as The High Priest according to the line of Melchizedek. Jesus' ministry to us as the only intercessor between us and the Father (1 Timothy 2:5) is eternal. Second, we will never be subject to the frailties of a human priesthood because Jesus replaced the Levitical Priesthood forever. Since Jesus lived as a Man on earth, He can identify with the things that trouble us in this life. "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" (Hebrews 4:15). Jesus provides all who believe in Him with hope that one day our human weakness will be removed and we will be restored to a new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 21:1).

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel lesson is from Mark 10 and follows James and John's request to "Grant that we may sit, one on Your right and one on Your left, in Your glory" (Mark 10:37). Jesus taught them that they would suffer for Him, but it was not for them to choose their position as this was up to the will of His Father (Matthew 10:38-40). This discussion caused the other ten disciples to "feel indignant with James and John" (v. 41). Next, on their way to Jerusalem they stopped along the way in Jericho.

Gospel Reading:

Mark 10:46-52 NAS95 46 Then they came to Jericho. And as He was leaving Jericho with His disciples and a large crowd, a blind beggar named Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the road. 47 When he heard that it was Jesus the Nazarene, he began to cry out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" 48 Many were sternly telling him to be quiet, but he kept crying out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" 49 And Jesus stopped and said, "Call him here." So they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take courage, stand up! He is calling for you." 50

Throwing aside his cloak, he jumped up and came to Jesus. 51 And answering him, Jesus said, "What do you want Me to do for you?" And the blind man said to Him, "Rabboni, I want to regain my sight!" 52 And Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and began following Him on the road.

The beggar named Bartimaeus is a name that means son of Timaeus, because "bar" means "son of." Blind people in this culture had few resources and were without any sort of social support systems so they frequently had to resort to begging. Bartimaeus took great initiative and jumped up on his own, the text doesn't say that someone else led him there. Twice he called to Jesus using the messianic title "Son of David." This indicated that he had some knowledge about who Jesus was. He recognized that Jesus was the only One that could open the eyes of the blind both in the physical sense but also spiritually as well through his use of the messianic title for Him. The blind man then heard the people calling to him and then threw away his cloak, possibly the only valuable possession that he owned. Bartimaeus not only received his sight but the text says that "his faith made him well" (v. 52), meaning that he also received the forgiveness of his sins as well. Afterwards he became a follower of Jesus, both literally and spiritually (v. 52).

What does this mean for us today? We too have to be willing to talk a bold step of faith and throw away our valuable possessions in order to find spiritual healing through Jesus. As former unbelievers, we too are blind to the reality of sin in our lives. Saint Paul says, "And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Corinthians 4:3-4). There are many reasons that Jesus calls Himself the Light of the World (John 8:12) because as the Light He shines truth upon the spiritual darkness of our hearts. It is only through faith in Jesus that we receive spiritual life (Ephesians 2:8-9). Finally, we can praise God for this tremendous miracle of healing that he provided Bartimaeus in a culture where blind people were on the lowest rung of society. We can praise Him for all of the times that He has healed us and others around us, even if we were not aware of His intervention on our behalf.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. In the first reading we said that God would make good on both His promises to Israel and His promises to the church. Reflect upon the following promises that God has made to you and how this provides you with hope during the troubled and shorts days of your earthly lifetime.

A. Salvation to all who believe in His Son Jesus. "Romans 1:16-17 NAS95 16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'BUT THE RIGHTEOUS man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.'"

B. God will work out all things for the our good as a believer. "Romans 8:28 NAS95 28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."

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C. As believers we receive a new life in Christ. "2 Corinthians 5:17 NAS95 17 Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come."

D. God promises believers peace when they persist in calling upon Him in prayer. "Philippians 4:6-7 NAS95 6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

2. The Book of Hebrews begins with, "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe" (Hebrews 1:1-2). In what ways is Jesus as the truly eternal high priest / king (that fulfilled the requirements of the Law) the only possible One who can make intercession for us (1 Timothy 2:5)?

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/102515.cfm

Source(s):

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Keywords:

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **10-11-2015**. I remember the time when I came home from the office and I saw an ambulance in my neighbor's driveway. Harvey was a man that had retired from the assembly line at General Motors. He was a rough-around-the-edges kind of guy, not someone that you would find going to church each Sunday although his wife did regularly attend. Harvey had struggled with sepsis and had been very close to dying. I had wondered about his spiritual beliefs, and I was sad that I had never shared with him the faith that I had in Jesus Christ. He pulled through this episode, but had horrible ongoing issues including kidney failure and the need for dialysis three times a week. After Harvey returned home, I finally got up the courage to send him a letter explaining the facts of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Even though I could not break through to him face to face, I figured that he would at least read the letter. I explained that his continuing life was evidence of a miracle from God. Later I moved to a far-away state, but I kept in frequent touch with Harvey by cell phone. I never saw any signs of spiritual life in him, but I maintained the relationship, and we developed a closer relationship than we had had when he was living across the street.

This week we will examine two very deep readings dealing with the important subject of eternal life. We will see in the first reading that the author used the Old Testament as a means of providing an important spiritual lesson for his readers. Then we will learn how Jesus answered a bold question about how to obtain eternal life. If you stick with us, you will also learn about what happened to my friend Harvey.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Apocrypha. This body of work provides important historical insights into the 400-year silent period just prior to the birth of Jesus. We encourage our readers to become

familiar with the cultural and historical context leading up to the publishing of the New Testament.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from the Book of Hebrews, which we also studied last week. This week's reading follows the author's warning in chapter 4 about falling short of true salvation. The writer is providing a clear warning about the sin of unbelief by using the story about what had happened to the unbelieving Jews wandering in the desert. Saint Paul explained the use of the Old Testament Scriptures this way. "For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Romans 15:4). The writer of Hebrews expects his readers to be aware of the Old Testament writings and to take them to heart!

Hebrews 4 begins with the conjunction "therefore," connecting what he is about to say with the previous section. The author had explained the danger of the sin of unbelief. Those that don't believe, he said, would not enter God's rest, meaning the Promised Land. "And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient? So we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief" (Hebrews 3:18-19). He is referring to the report of the spies after they had checked out the land they were to enter. "So they gave out to the sons of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out, saying, 'The land through which we have gone, in spying it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants; and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great size'" (Numbers 13:32). The unbelievers were those who had accepted the majority report given by the spies after they had surveyed the Land. Moses said that the people wouldn't enter their physical rest through entrance into the Promised Land because of their unbelief, but the writer uses this Old Testament story as a metaphor to teach a much more significant application.

Unbelievers then and now will also not enter into God's eternal rest, since the only unforgivable sin in the Bible is the sin of unbelief (Mark 3:28-30). This explanation provides clarity to chapter 4:1, "Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it." The author is drawing a metaphor from the Old Testament experience. There the people's physical rest was gained through entrance into the Promised Land. This is compared with his contemporary readers' finding eternal rest by entrance into a relationship with God through faith. Everyone throughout history gains eternal life the same way—through faith in the One True God and his Savior, so the author used the illustration of the unbelieving Jews in the exodus as a warning to his readers about the danger of this unforgivable sin.

As we move toward verse 12, where today's reading begins, we see the author's summary statement about the heart of the matter, belief in God's written Word. "For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard" (Hebrews 4:2). The writer goes on to explain that entrance into God's rest comes through faith, not works. "For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His" (Hebrews 4:10). Saint Paul, also, emphasized that faith

is the basis for salvation: "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). With this extensive introduction, which we included because of its direct connection to the Gospel lesson, let us now study the text from today's reading. As you read, keep in mind the key concept of the saving value of faith.

Second Reading:

Note: Verse 11, which was omitted from the reading, has been included because it provides crucial information about the context and brings out the full meaning.
Hebrews 4:11-13 NAS95 11 Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through following the same example of disobedience. 12 For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. 13 And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.

The author warns his readers not to follow the example of disobedience set by the unbelieving Jews in the exodus. The wandering Jews in the wilderness had God's direct testimony to them in many ways, including revelation of His Law to Moses and His presence with them through the pillar of cloud by day and fire by night (Exodus 13:21-22). Yet, the Hebrew people still didn't believe God's promises about finding rest in the Promised Land. When Moses sent out spies to survey the Promised Land, only Joshua and Caleb came back bearing the good news about what they saw in the land, and that they were confident about God's promises to them about taking control of it (Numbers 14:6-9). Instead of following this "minority report," the Hebrews believed the majority's view that it would be better to return to Egypt than to attempt to enter the Land. And they then began making plans to do just that (Numbers 14:1-4).

The author uses this spiritual metaphor to warn us not to follow their example of gross disobedience, not believing God, the only unforgivable sin in the Bible. Interestingly, verse 12 opens with the preposition "for," which provides a natural linkage with the immediate preceding context. The opening verse, then, could be read this way, "[With] these previous things in mind, the Word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword . . . ." In the case of the Hebrews in the exodus the Word of God came to them directly through Moses and the priests. In the case of the New Testament context the Word of God comes through God's written Word. It is this written Word that is "living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword (v. 12a). The author says that the Word is "able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (v. 12d). The Word of God convicts us of our sin through the ***illumination*** provided by God's Holy Spirit. "Illumination," in the spiritual sense, is the turning on of the light bulb in the mind of a person regarding the things of God. There are levels of illumination, and the knowledge of sin is the very first and most basic level. This is what the author of Hebrews is getting at in the reading, where he later criticizes his readers because they are spiritual babies able only to partake of spiritual milk and not solid food (Hebrews 5:12). He cautions his readers in the closing verse to remember that they cannot fool God about all of this

because "all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him" (v. 13b).

There is one primary application of the reading for us today. The testimony of God given through the revelation of Jesus Christ in the Bible must not be neglected by anyone. We must not follow the example of the disobedient Jews in the exodus who did not believe God's promises. Rather we should believe and follow the only way to God which is through faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus has made this perfectly clear. He said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6). Peter warned the unbelievers in the Book of Acts about rejecting Jesus, when he said, "He (Jesus) is the STONE WHICH WAS REJECTED by you, THE BUILDERS, but WHICH BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER stone. And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:11-12). As believers we follow the minority report given by the godly patriarchs of the faith like Joshua and Caleb. We don't follow the majority view of the unbelieving world, and we work to fulfill the Great Commission in leading others who are on this broad road to the narrow way of life through faith in Jesus Christ (Matthew 7:13-14)

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading continues with the study in Mark. This week's story occurs just after Jesus was confronted by the Pharisees who attempted to trap Him with a question about divorce (Mark 10:2). Jesus referred them to biblical truths from the Old Testament and then privately explained them in further detail to His disciples. Afterwards the crowds brought children to Jesus, and the disciples tried o turn them away, which caused Jesus' rebuke of them (Mark 10:13). As Jesus was preparing to leave this area, He was confronted by a man who asked Him a very important question.

Gospel Reading:
Mark 10:17-30 NAS95 17 As He was setting out on a journey, a man ran up to Him and knelt before Him, and asked Him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" 18 And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone. 19 You know the commandments, 'DO NOT MURDER, DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, DO NOT STEAL, DO NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS, Do not defraud, HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER.'" 20 And he said to Him, "Teacher, I have kept all these things from my youth up." 21 Looking at him, Jesus felt a love for him and said to him, "One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." 22 But at these words he was saddened, and he went away grieving, for he was one who owned much property. 23 And Jesus, looking around, said to His disciples, "How hard it will be for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God!" 24 The disciples were amazed at His words. But Jesus answered again and said to them, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! 25 It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." 26 They were even more astonished and said to Him, "Then who can be saved?" 27 Looking at them, Jesus said, "With people it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God." 28 Peter began to say to Him, "Behold, we have left everything and followed You." 29 Jesus said, "Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel's sake,

30 but that he will receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life."

In the reading we see a man who just asked Jesus the most important question in the universe, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" (v. 17). Yet in the man's question there is an inherent fallacy. As the crowd was fresh from Jesus' confrontation with the Pharisees who were committed "doers" of the Law, the man asked Jesus what ***he*** should do to inherit eternal life. Jesus, knowing the man's heart, knew that this man had kept the Ten Commandments, and so He recited the ones dealing with things to do and not to do (v. 19). However, although Jesus didn't question his observance of the Law, He cut to the heart of the matter for him, his stumbling stone, which was the worship of his personal treasures over the worship of God. Jesus knew that, although the inquirer was following most of the commandments, it was the first one over which he was stumbling: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before Me" (Exodus 20:2-3). Saint Paul said that it wasn't riches itself that created evil, but that the ***love of money*** was the root of all evil (1 Timothy 6:10).

Jesus then went on to explain the quandary using an illustration of a needle and camel (v. 25). Some have thought that Jesus was referring to a certain very low gate in Jerusalem which required the rider and camel to duck down in order to enter. No such gate has ever been located in Jerusalem, and if there were such a gate, it wouldn't prove that a man can enter the kingdom of heaven through his good works. Instead, what Jesus was teaching was it is impossible to gain eternal life through any good works, but that it is offered only by God's gracious provision alone. Even rich people, Jesus explained, can enter the kingdom through faith because "all things are possible with God" (v. 27). Entrance into this kingdom does require sacrifice though, because one must give up the things he trusts in in order to trust fully and only in God's grace. In the case of the rich man this would mean giving up the "worship" of his riches and turning only to the worship of God. Remember that Jesus had just told the people to take drastic actions regarding the things which were keeping them from following Him: "If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life crippled, than, having your two hands, to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire" (Mark 9:43 On one occasion Peter told Jesus that he had given up everything to follow Him, to which Jesus replied that he, and anyone who gave up something for Jesus, would receive a hundred times what was given up (v. 30). In other words, the investment in Jesus would be worth it, with a ten thousand percent return on investment in the present age, with eternal life thrown in, to boot.

What does this mean for us today? We cannot overstate the importance of the application of Jesus' teaching in these few verses. First, we cannot earn eternal life by doing anything; that comes only through belief in Jesus Christ alone. Saint Paul said, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). We are all sinners and cannot change that without the outside intervention of God, no matter how hard we try. The rich man in the story tried very hard, yet even he was unable to cleanse his heart through keeping the commandments. When measured against God's perfect standard, he fell far short, and Jesus revealed to him that he had disobeyed the first and most important commandment, loving God above everything else. If we think we can be saved by our good

works, or that our good works are meritorious towards salvation, Paul explains the relationship between faith and works. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus **for good works**, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10, emphasis added). Paul said, "He saved us, **not on the basis of deeds** which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5, emphasis added). Our good works flow out of our faith in Jesus Christ as the result of a heart that has been changed by God, or "born from above (or again)." Jesus told Nicodemus, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3b). Nicodemus didn't understand Jesus until later in his life, but God saw to it that his story was recorded in the Bible so that we could identify with this "Nick at Night."

What about us, are we relying upon something other than God to earn our way into heaven? Are we like the rich man, who was likely very generous in giving, withholding our true worship for God alone? Are we believing the minority report offered up by men of faith, or following the majority view of those who shrink back from following God, or who try to purchase their way into heaven through their supposed good works, no matter how valid they may be? Do we think that we can duck low enough to ride our camel through some super-secret entrance gate into heaven? These are powerful things for us to ponder, and we can be overjoyed that God has given us clear answers from His Holy Word. "Our good works are the true riches that we will be able to present to God as evidence of salvation. Jesus called it our "bearing of fruit in keeping with repentance" (Matthew 3:8).

I introduced my former neighbor Harvey in the introduction to this week's lesson. After I moved away I kept in touch with Harvey and also developed a closer relationship with his wife who kept me up to date on the various emergencies that developed concerning my friend. One weekend I travelled back to my former town to visit some friends who just happened to live down the street from my former home and my friend Harvey. One night I had a strange sense that something was going on with Harvey and I planned to visit him the following morning. After I awoke the next morning, I received a call from his daughter who told me that Harvey had passed away early that morning. She explained that the local pastor was with Harvey, and that he had requested to be baptized before he died. Harvey evidently gave testimony regarding his faith in Jesus. Harvey proceeded with this bold testimony of faith by submitting to baptism and died a short time later. A few days later I had the opportunity to meet the pastor at the funeral luncheon. I explained to him how Harvey had been deeply moved by the frequent visits of his church's members during years as he suffered from declining health. As his eyes began to well up with tears, along with my own, I told him that his faithful service and that of his church were the reasons that Harvey trusted in the Lord Jesus. I told him that Harvey often spoke about their visits and how thankful I was that they had served him in this way.

As I reflect upon what Harvey meant to me, I remember that at some point God had prompted me to begin praying for Harvey. God gave me a sense that salvation was possible even for Harvey, no matter what my feelings told me about the matter. Just to check, I plugged his name into a Google search and was greeted with his smiling face from his memorial page. That reminded me that Harvey is alive forever in heaven, and one day I will visit him again. I have asked God to make this

man one of the first people that I meet when I get to heaven. The evidence of his changed life just before he died has been a life-changing event for me. His testimony provides me with hope that God can reach even those we think are too hard to reach.

What about you, is there someone in your life who you feel is would never believe but yet God seems to keep having you bump into them? Will you pray to begin reaching out to them in even the smallest ways, and that God would embolden you to share the story of how Jesus has changed your life?

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. We saw in the opening verse of the passage from Hebrews (which was omitted from the reading) this key sentence: "*11 Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through following the same example of disobedience*" (Hebrews 4:11). Later we provided this verse from Saint Paul. "*Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come*" (1 Corinthians 10:11).

List and discuss how you have benefited from studying the lives of two specific biblical characters in the Old Testament. In what ways have you learned from their obedience or disobedience?

2. What you understand about the relationship between faith and works in terms of gaining eternal life? Second, how does your position correspond to what James said, "Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself" (James 2:17).

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/101115.cfm

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Mass Study Notes for Sunday 9-6-2015

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 **9-6-2015**. This week, in the first reading, we examine the Prophet Isaiah's message regarding the future healing coming from God upon the whole sin-broken world. This message especially resonated to the Jews who were under attack from the King of Assyria during this time. Then we continue the study from the Book of James in the second reading. We close with the continuing study from the Gospel of Mark in which Jesus heals a deaf and mute man.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Prophet Isaiah. The historical context is during the time when King Hezekiah had made an alliance with Egypt (Isaiah 30:1-2) thereby provoking Sennacherib the King of Assyria. Hezekiah's revolt against Assyria ultimately led to his humiliation in which he was forced to cede reparations as recorded in Second Kings. The people were very afraid of the Assyrian King because he had already conquered and taken captive the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Hezekiah's unwise decision to trust in an alliance with Egypt angered God. However at some point he came to his senses and confessed his wrongdoing, then tried to buy peace with Sennacherib. "*King Hezekiah of Judah sent to the king of Assyria at Lachish, saying, 'I have done wrong; withdraw from me; whatever you impose on me I will bear.' The king of Assyria demanded of King Hezekiah of Judah three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold. Hezekiah gave him all the silver that was found in the house of the LORD and in the treasuries of the king's house. At that time Hezekiah stripped the gold from the doors of the temple of the LORD, and from the doorposts that King Hezekiah of Judah had overlaid and gave it to the king of Assyria* "2 Kings 18:14-16).

Equally import to the historical context is the location of the reading in the whole of Isaiah and the overall theological context. Today's reading from Chapter 35 precedes a section in Isaiah regarding

the future judgment of the Edomites. This is a people that can be taken both literally (as a region) and figuratively, as anyone (or nation) who opposes God. Edom is the nation that descended from Isaac's firstborn son, Esau. Esau was Jacob's brother and the one who claimed the promises of God and the blessing from Israel. Although Esau didn't war with the Hebrew people during the time of Jacob, his descendants became sworn enemies of the Jews. God says about the Edomites in Chapter 34, "For My sword is satiated in heaven, Behold it shall descend for judgment upon Edom And upon the people whom I have devoted to destruction" (Isaiah 34:5). Although we don't know exactly how God's judgment of Edom will play out, we are told many details about the judgment of the earth which must take place before Jesus returns to rule the earth. Scripture seems to indicate that the timing of the judgment is in the distant future, during what is known as the Day of the Lord (DOL). This period of God's judgment of the seals, trumpets, and bowls as described in Revelation will be accompanied with signs in the heavens. Isaiah said "the sky will be rolled up like a scroll" (Isaiah 34:4b) just as it says in Revelation 6:14. Today's reading is a message regarding the future restoration after the terrible period of time after the DOL. As in many of the prophetic passages in the Bible, and especially in Isaiah, we can locate both near term fulfillments as well as unfulfilled events that will happen sometime in the future. In some cases we can clearly see partial fulfillments of certain passages through the first coming of Jesus, but yet it is clear that the complete fulfillment won't occur until the second coming of the Lord. This is the case with today's reading.

First Reading:

Isaiah 35:4-7 NAS95 4 Say to those with anxious heart, "Take courage, fear not. Behold, your God will come with vengeance; The recompense of God will come, But He will save you." 5 Then the eyes of the blind will be opened And the ears of the deaf will be unstopped. 6 Then the lame will leap like a deer, And the tongue of the mute will shout for joy. For waters will break forth in the wilderness And streams in the Arabah. 7 The scorched land will become a pool And the thirsty ground springs of water; In the haunt of jackals, its resting place, Grass becomes reeds and rushes.

The heart of the message was that God would first destroy His enemies and then restore the land. Although the message contained a message of physical healing, the prophet was also speaking metaphorically about the spiritual healing that would occur in the future when all of Israel would be saved (Romans 11:26). In terms of the historical context Isaiah spoke to the people of Judah that were being threatened with attack from the Assyrian Empire who had already devastated their brothers in the Northern Kingdom. The Prophet provided a message of hope to the people, that ultimately God would prevail over his enemies by "com[ing] with vengeance, with terrible recompense" (v. 4d). This will lead to the salvation of the people, "He will come and save you" (v. 4f). During that time the land shall be restored from war, all the evils of the world will be reversed including blindness, deafness, lameness, and the inability to speak (v. 5). The desert shall be watered (v. 6c) and the hot sand shall be blessed with cool water (v. 7). The land, including the region of Edom that was destroyed by God (Isaiah 34:5) and had been turned into the haunt of jackals will be restored. The Prophet's message would have provided comfort to the people as they faced the onslaught of King Sennacherib while their own king tried to buy the country's freedom

against this vast imposing army. While the people lived with the imminent threat of the Assyrians, Isaiah's message would have been a rallying cry for exclaiming the power of the one true God over their enemies.

When we look at the ways in which Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled after his time we see that Jesus quoted from this very text. The way in which this happened was while John the Baptist was in prison. He evidently began to have some doubts as to whether Jesus truly was the Messiah. Perhaps he questioned why Jesus would allow him to be imprisoned. John the Baptist sent word to Jesus from prison saying, "Are You the Expected One, or shall we look for someone else?"(Matthew 11:3). Jesus answered by quoting from Isaiah. "Go and report to John what you hear and see: the BLIND RECEIVE SIGHT and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the POOR HAVE THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THEM" (Matthew 11:4-5). Jesus said that His healing ministry was in fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. Later in the Gospel reading we will see another instance of how Jesus fulfilled this prophecy from Isaiah. Like many prophecies in the Old Testament this one was only partially fulfilled during Jesus earthly lifetime. The final fulfilment will happen when the Lord returns to establish his kingdom on earth.

The message of Isaiah for our current day includes a couple of possible application points. One, we can believe in Jesus as the Messiah and be saved from the destructive nature of sin in our own lives. No matter what we have done or what has been done to us that is sinful, Jesus the Messiah, can heal and restore the brokenness of sin. Two, when we have this type of relationship with Jesus, we can also see God the Father's heart, now, through a different lens. Instead of fearing God's wrath and punishment for sin, we can draw close to God's heart that is tender and fiercely loyal to His sons and daughters who are in distress. Romans 8:1 tells us that there is no longer any condemnation associated with those who are in Christ Jesus. So we can boldly approach the throne of grace with confidence (Hebrews 4:16). The fact that God is eager to save and embrace us should encourage and embolden us to live in light of His abiding presence in our lives.

You may wonder how things turned out for Judah. If you read further ahead in Isaiah you can see how God worked mightily but only after Hezekiah came to his senses. Instead of leaning upon foreign alliances and gold to buy his way out, King Hezekiah eventually turned to God for deliverance, "he tore his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth and entered the house of the LORD" (Isaiah 37:1). God answered his heartfelt plea by devastating the Assyrian army: "Then the angel of the LORD went out and struck 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians; and when men arose early in the morning, behold, all of these were dead" (Isaiah 37:36).

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is a continuation of the study begun in James last week. The Book of James is a Book called the "Proverbs of the New Testament" and is filled with practical wisdom for being a Christian. This reading follows James' teaching on the basic practices of religion which included "visiting orphans and widows in their distress, and keeping oneself unstained by the world" (James 1:27). This James is the one who led the first Ecumenical Council recorded in Acts 15 which dealt

with rebutting the false teaching that "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved" (Acts 15:1). During this meeting James stood up, announced a summary of the scriptural teachings on the matter (from the Old Testament), and provided the authoritative, final judgment on how the church should proceed. His teaching in the Book by his name came to the early church with the same sense of authority that he had during the proceedings of the first church council.

Note: The reading omitted verses 6 – 7 which have been included below.

Second Reading:

James 2:1-5 NAS95 1 My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism. 2 For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, 3 and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, "You sit here in a good place," and you say to the poor man, "You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool," 4 have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives? 5 Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?

6 But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court? 7 Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called?

This passage is teaching the importance of reflecting the nature of God by treating everyone with fairness and honor. Showing favoritism in the church reflects a muddy picture of God's heart, confusing people about who God is and what He values. We are to value each person as God values them, and thus avoid the class wars and pecking orders of the world. The poor in this world have a lot to teach those who are supposedly "rich" by material standards. Instead of favoritism dictating our treatment of people, God's love for all should level the playing field. We can now approach others (rich or poor) with a sense of humility, giving them honor as image bearers of God.

James provides an excellent warning about how God hates pride (Proverbs 8:13) and desires for unity in the Church (John 17). If you think about it, the higher a person is, the further they have to fall! James' lesson closely parallels the Parable of the Wedding Feast:

7 And He began speaking a parable to the invited guests when He noticed how they had been picking out the places of honor at the table, saying to them, 8 "When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for someone more distinguished than you may have been invited by him, 9 and he who invited you both will come and say to you, 'Give your place to this man,' and then in disgrace you proceed to occupy the last place. 10 But when you are invited, go and recline at the last place, so that when the one who has invited you comes, he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher'; then you will have honor in the sight of all who are at the table with you.

11 For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." (Lu 14:7-11)

In the parable, the central truth is Jesus' message regarding the sinfulness of pride as well as a call to servanthood. In reality, using the illustration of the feast, the proudest person in the room may be one collecting the food trays after the mea! Only God truly knows the heart (1 Corinthians 2:11), although wealth and power are often accompanied with pride. In this illustration Jesus is calling us to reflect upon the times in which we have positioned ourselves "at the head of the table," or when we have learned from the mistakes of others in positions of power.

As a college professor who taught in various state prisons for a half dozen years one of the primary lessons I learned was to avoid rushing to judgment of a person based upon their appearance. Prison had a way of leveling the class differences because although everyone dressed uniformly, between hairstyles, tattoos (and scars) the students had ways of making themselves appear differently. Yet even with the students wearing the same uniforms over the course of the class, it would become obvious that there was a "pecking order" among them. Some, like the rich man, "sat" in positions of power, regardless of the location of their physical desk in the classroom. Others were subservient to the leadership positions among the students which became obvious to me over the course of the semester, but which the students already knew. Places of power don't always mean sitting at the head of the table.

It is instrumental to have a proper understanding of the point that James and Jesus were getting at in order to apply these lessons to our lives. The meaning that they had in mind is best illustrated by Psalm 73. Let's read that entire text and meditate upon it before moving onto the Gospel lesson.

Psalms 73:1-28 NAS95 1 <<A Psalm of Asaph.>> Surely God is good to Israel, To those who are pure in heart! 2 But as for me, my feet came close to stumbling, My steps had almost slipped. 3 For I was envious of the arrogant As I saw the prosperity of the wicked. 4 For there are no pains in their death, And their body is fat. 5 They are not in trouble as other men, Nor are they plagued like mankind. 6 Therefore pride is their necklace; The garment of violence covers them. 7 Their eye bulges from fatness; The imaginations of their heart run riot. 8 They mock and wickedly speak of oppression; They speak from on high. 9 They have set their mouth against the heavens, And their tongue parades through the earth. 10 Therefore his people return to this place, And waters of abundance are drunk by them. 11 They say, "How does God know? And is there knowledge with the Most High?" 12 Behold, these are the wicked; And always at ease, they have increased in wealth. 13 Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure And washed my hands in innocence; 14 For I have been stricken all day long And chastened every morning. 15 If I had said, "I will speak thus," Behold, I would have betrayed the generation of Your children. 16 When I pondered to understand this, It was troublesome in my sight 17 Until I came into the sanctuary of God; Then I perceived their end. 18 Surely You set them in slippery places; You cast them down to destruction. 19 How they are destroyed in a moment! They are utterly swept away by sudden terrors! 20 Like a dream when one awakes, O Lord, when aroused, You will despise their form. 21 When my heart was embittered And I was pierced within, 22 Then I was senseless and ignorant; I was like a beast before You. 23

Nevertheless I am continually with You; You have taken hold of my right hand. 24 With Your counsel You will guide me, And afterward receive me to glory. 25 Whom have I in heaven but You? And besides You, I desire nothing on earth. 26 My flesh and my heart may fail, But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. 27 For, behold, those who are far from You will perish; You have destroyed all those who are unfaithful to You. 28 But as for me, the nearness of God is my good; I have made the Lord GOD my refuge, That I may tell of all Your works.

Although the people who are rich in faith may suffer during this lifetime, those that are only rich in material things and full of pride will suffer eternal destruction.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading continues from Mark that we looked at last week. This week the context is Jesus' teaching in the Gentile region of the Decapolis to the east of the Jordan. Today's reading follows the healing of a Gentile in the region of Tyre and Sidon (Mark 7:24) when Jesus cast out a demon from the Syrophoenician woman's daughter (Mark 7:24-30). Interestingly, the Decapolis was the same region in which Jesus was asked to leave after healing the man possessed by a legion of demons. Once the demons left the out of control man, they entered a herd of 2000 pigs, which caused them to run off a cliff into the Sea of Galilee and be destroyed. When the owners found out about this "they began to implore Him to leave their region" (Mark 5:17). Nonetheless, Jesus returned there and resumed His healing ministry. Perhaps this was because the formerly demon possessed man whom He healed went and told many others in that region about Jesus (Mark 4:20).

Gospel Reading:

Mark 7:31-37 NAS95 31 Again He went out from the region of Tyre, and came through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, within the region of Decapolis. 32 They brought to Him one who was deaf and spoke with difficulty, and they implored Him to lay His hand on him. 33 Jesus took him aside from the crowd, by himself, and put His fingers into his ears, and after spitting, He touched his tongue with the saliva; 34 and looking up to heaven with a deep sigh, He said to him, "Ephphatha!" that is, "Be opened!" 35 And his ears were opened, and the impediment of his tongue was removed, and he began speaking plainly. 36 And He gave them orders not to tell anyone; but the more He ordered them, the more widely they continued to proclaim it. 37 They were utterly astonished, saying, "He has done all things well; He makes even the deaf to hear and the mute to speak."

He took a very long and circuitous route to get to the Decapolis by going from Tyre through Sidon and then back to the Decapolis (v. 31). We are not told the reason why he would have taken this route and the possible many months it would have required. Despite them having earlier asked Jesus to leave their region someone brought a man to Him for healing. Jesus separated the man from the crowd then proceeded to heal him. Jesus used two physical signs to manifest the healing given to Him by His Father God. First, he put his fingers into the man's ears, and then placed His own saliva on the man's tongue (v. 33). Evidently he did this to accommodate the others who were watching ("they" in v. 37). Jesus looked up to heaven and sighed showing His reliance upon God the Father as

well as His compassion for the man's condition brought on by the fallen world. Next, the first thing Jesus told them including the man whose speech was restored was to keep silent! Jesus knew that His time had not yet come (John 7:6) and having these people broadcast about Him wouldn't serve the timing of the perfect plan the Father had for Him. Another perspective is that His statement to keep quiet had more to do with His disciples than about the Gentiles who were present during the healing. As we mentioned in the first reading, the prophets like Isaiah used physical blindness and deafness as a metaphor for the people's spiritual condition. At this point Jesus' own disciples didn't understand the spiritual significance of all that was going on because in the very next chapter He told them, "Do you not yet see or understand? Do you have a hardened heart? HAVING EYES, DO YOU NOT SEE? AND HAVING EARS, DO YOU NOT HEAR?" (Mark 8:17c – 18b). Jesus, knowing that by asking the Gentiles to keep quiet may stir them on to proclaim the healing that much more may have been making a statement to His disciples about their unbelief. This, along with the fact that the disciples would have been familiar with the Old Testament metaphor of blindness and that Jesus opened the eyes of a blind man lends more credence to this interpretation. Jesus is in effect telling His disciples that He can open the eyes of the blind but they were still spiritually blind to many of the realities of His nature. Although Peter soon afterwards confessed that Jesus is the Christ (Matthew 16:16), all of them had a lot to learn about Jesus – even after He rose from the dead.

There are many applications of Jesus message for our lives today, here are a few:

- Jesus' healing of the blind man's physical ailments reminds us of the need for everyone's need for a spiritual birth. Spiritual blindness is the primary condition that vexes humanity today, the only unforgivable sin (Mark 3:22-30). In John's Gospel Jesus said that "unless a person is born from above they will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (John 3:3). Saint Paul said that "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23), and "the wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). Paul continued by saying, "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" (Romans 10:9). The Scripture is clear that "faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God" (Romans 10:17). We cannot earn this free gift but must accept it in faith. "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them" (Ephesians 2:8-10).
- If we desire to be like Jesus, we too can be drawn to minister to the handicapped. Taking into account what we learned from James, the "handicapped" aren't necessarily just the people with obvious physical issues. Instead, we can pray to consider ministering to those who are marginalized in our society.
- As we learned in the reading from Isaiah, if we and others for whom we care are struggling with handicaps, remember how the prophetic messages in the Bible point us to the perfect healing we will one day receive with the Lord Jesus. For some this may mean experiencing physical death and meeting Jesus in heaven (John 14:3).
- We too can be astonished that Jesus does all things well (v. 37a,b)! Jesus lived a perfect life and we can be changed by how He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of

death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:8).

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. Develop a list of some categories of people who are marginalized in our society. Second, ask God in what ways you can be praying for specific people that you know fall into this category. Ask God to show you His will regarding ways in which you could minister to one of these people before the end of the year.

2. Read John 14:1-3 and answer the question that follows.

John 14:1-3 NAS95 1 "Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. 2 "In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. 3 "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.

A. How does knowing that Jesus is 1. Going to prepare a place for you, and 2. Going to meet you when you get there, help you to face the handicaps you are experiencing in your life today?

B. Especially in light of how God has helped you with any "handicaps," would you consider sharing your testimony with the fellow readers of Mass Notes? If so, please send me your testimony or upload it in the form provided on the web site.

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/090615.cfm

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB