Study Notes for the Sunday Mass Published by Christians for Christ Ministries. We are a non-denominational Christian ministry that seeks to encourage and facilitate Christians in studying the Holy Scriptures. **"For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus."** 1 Timothy 2:5

Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 12-27-2015



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **12-27-2015**. This week we open with 1 Samuel 1 where God gives a barren woman a son, whom she dedicates back to the Lord and His service. Then we move to Colossians 3 where we are told to live out the virtues of Christ in response to all He has done in and for us. Finally, we conclude with the Gospel of St. Luke 2 where Jesus begins to reveal His deity and many around him are amazed.

Introduction to the First Reading:

Gender reveal parties have become a popular way for expecting couples to reveal the gender of their baby to family and friends. It is a fun excuse for a party but the truth is, in our society, most people are thrilled and thankful no matter what the gender is.

If the technology had been available, a gender reveal party would have made more sense in Old Testament times. It was important among the Hebrew people to have children. Barrenness was seen as a curse and children as a blessing from the Lord. It was an even greater blessing to have a boy because the family name, inheritance, and headship were passed down through the son.

Elkanah, a man who lived during the time of the Old Testament judges, had two wives—Peninnah and Hannah. There was a rivalry between the two, and Peninnah, who had several sons and daughters, would regularly provoke Hannah because she was barren. This caused Hannah great sorrow.

Yearly, Elkanah would go up to the temple in Shiloh to worship the Lord there. On one of these trips,

Hannah poured out her sorrow in the form of a prayer and vow to God. She promised that if God would give her a son, she would in turn give him back to the Lord to serve Him all the days of his life. God heard her prayer and gave her a son whom she named Samuel.

In the First Reading, we see Hannah fulfilling her vow to God. How hard it must have been for her to relinquish her only son to the Lord. Once the child was weaned, she took him to Eli, the priest at Shiloh, and presented him for service to God. What a great demonstration of faith this was.

Sometime later, but while Samuel was still a young boy, God called him to be a prophet in Israel and used him in a powerful way to reveal God's direction and will to God's people. Samuel faithfully spoke the word of the Lord concerning Israel all the days of his life. At God's direction, he anointed David to rule as king over Israel. Eventually another king would come from the house and line of David who would save His people from their sins and reign in righteousness. This king is Jesus.

First Reading:

1 Samuel 1:20-28 NAS95 20 It came about in due time, after Hannah had conceived, that she gave birth to a son; and she named him Samuel, saying, "Because I have asked him of the LORD." 21 Then the man Elkanah went up with all his household to offer to the LORD the yearly sacrifice and pay his vow. 22 But Hannah did not go up, for she said to her husband, "I will not go up until the child is weaned; then I will bring him, that he may appear before the LORD and stay there forever." 23 Elkanah her husband said to her, "Do what seems best to you. Remain until you have weaned him; only may the LORD confirm His word." So the woman remained and nursed her son until she weaned him. 24 Now when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, with a three-year-old bull and one ephah of flour and a jug of wine, and brought him to the house of the LORD in Shiloh, although the child was young. 25 Then they slaughtered the bull, and brought the boy to Eli. 26 She said, "Oh, my lord! As your soul lives, my lord, I am the woman who stood here beside you, praying to the LORD. 27 "For this boy I prayed, and the LORD has given me my petition which I asked of Him. 28 "So I have also dedicated him to the LORD; as long as he lives he is dedicated to the LORD." And he worshiped the LORD there.

Like Samuel, our children are a gift from God. We don't have to turn them over to full-time service in the church in order to dedicate them to Him. Teach them to serve God whole-heartedly no matter what profession they choose, knowing that God can do much with a man or woman whose heart is fully devoted to Him.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

In many of the Apostle Paul's letters, he presents a tragic picture of us in our sinful, fallen state and contrasts us with Christ in his holiness and perfection. In addition, he recounts what God has done for us in His grace, when we deserved only wrath. Once we understand the depth of our sin and the

riches of His grace toward us, only then does he ask us to live a life that properly honors God and reflects His glory.

In the book of Colossians, St. Paul tells us that we were enemies of God, alienated from Him and living in spiritual and moral darkness (Col.1:13,21). Jesus on the other hand, is the perfect image of the invisible God and supreme over all creation (1: 15-18). By His death He rescued us from the dominion of darkness and reconciled us to God, presenting us free from blemish and accusation (1:13, 22). Because of this, St. Paul says we are to live a life displaying His virtues and being thankful.

Second Reading:

Colossians 3:12-21 NAS95 12 So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. 14 Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. 15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. 17 Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father. 18 Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. 19 Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them. 20 Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord. 21 Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart.

To display these virtues, we must cooperate with God's work of transformation. If you read all of Ch. 3, you will notice how this passage is interspersed with action verbs that indicate there is something God wants us to do. Col. 3: 2 tells us to *set* our mind on things above—that is, to think about what we possess in the spiritual realm—salvation from our sin, peace with God, and eternal life, to name a few. Verse 5 tells us to *consider* ourselves dead to evil desires. Verse 9 tells us we are to *put aside* the old self and *put on* the new self. That means to actively put aside old habits and patterns of living associated with our old, sinful self and actively live out the virtues of our new life in Christ by the power of God's Spirit.

In the Second Reading, we are told to *put on* the virtues of compassion, forgiveness, peace, and love. We are to *let* the Word of Christ dwell in our hearts, living its wisdom and teaching its precepts to others. Wives are to *submit* to husbands, husbands are to *love t*heir wives, and children are to *obey* parents. God is transforming us into Christ's likeness and calling us to intentionally live out those virtues for the benefit of others and the glory of God.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The first 20 verses of the second chapter of the Gospel of St. Luke are some of the most well known of the whole New Testament. This is the story of Jesus' birth in a humble stable and the angels'

glorious announcement to the shepherds that a Savior has been born.

This Savior was God the Son who took on human flesh and was born as a baby—fully God and fully man. And just like other human babies, Jesus grew from an infant to a boy to a man, increasing in physical stature but also in wisdom and favor with God and men (Luke 2:40,52).

While much of his growth was typical, Jesus also developed in ways that astounded those around Him. This Gospel Reading recounts an occasion when Jesus, as a twelve-year-old boy, amazed the seasoned teachers in the temple with the depth of His understanding of the things of God.

Jesus had come to Jerusalem in a caravan with his parents to celebrate the Feast of the Passover. A day into the return trip, Mary and Joseph discovered their son was not with them. They quickly returned to Jerusalem, and after an anxious three-day search, found Jesus in the temple, interacting with the Jewish teachers.

Mothers everywhere can identify with Mary's response which was likely a mixture of relief and consternation: *"Why have you treated us this way? Behold, your father and I have been anxiously looking for you."* Jesus' response must have sounded impudent to those who didn't fully understand who He was. He asked, *"Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know I had to be in My Father's house?*

No, Mary didn't know. It seems neither she nor Joseph fully understood the implications of the statement their son had made to them. They didn't understand that Jesus was under the authority of another Father, a Heavenly One, and Jesus would soon follow that Father's will all the way to the cross. All would be revealed in the fullness of time. Until then, Jesus continued to live in subjection to His earthly parents, and Mary treasured all these things in her heart.

Gospel Reading:

Luke 2:41-52 NAS95 41 Now His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. 42 And when He became twelve, they went up there according to the custom of the Feast; 43 and as they were returning, after spending the full number of days, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. But His parents were unaware of it, 44 but supposed Him to be in the caravan, and went a day's journey; and they began looking for Him among their relatives and acquaintances. 45 When they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem looking for Him. 46 Then, after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. 47 And all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers. 48 When they saw Him, they were astonished; and His mother said to Him, "Son, why have You treated us this way? Behold, Your father and I have been anxiously looking for You." 49 And He said to them, "Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father's house?" 50 But they did not understand the statement which He had made to them. 51 And He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and He continued in subjection to them; and His mother treasured all these things in her heart. 52 And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

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Mary tried to make sense out of the events as they unfolded. We, on the other hand, have the whole written record of Jesus in the Bible. We know the rest of His story: He entered into ministry, performed miracles, claimed to be Son of God, and proclaimed that He was (and is) the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but by Him (Gospel of St John 14:6). He purchased our salvation through His death and resurrection, and someday He is coming again to rule and reign in righteousness. This Christmas season we can celebrate our Savior's birth and share the rest of this glorious story with all who come to celebrate with us.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. What can you do this week to actively put aside old habits and patterns of living associated with your old, sinful self and actively live out the virtues of your new life in Christ by the power of God's Spirit?

2. On Christmas a Savior was born. What can you do to help others around you know Jesus as their Savior?

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/122715.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 1-18-2015

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 1-18-2015. This week we open with the first reading from the Book of First Samuel in which we learn about God's calling of this important prophet. Then we move to Saint Paul's First letter to the Corinthians and close with the Gospel lesson from Saint John. I included a brief story about a personal struggle I was having that is very common among men, which I hope encourages all Christians to be pure in their daily lives. We also include this week a more detailed study at the end regarding understanding our identity in Christ.

The first reading is from the Book of First Samuel. The context is the commissioning of the Prophet Samuel in the era of the period known as the Judges. This was the period of time when the history of Israel followed a pattern of rising and falling. God would allow His people to fall into the hands of their enemies, next the people would repent and God would raise up a deliverer. After some time in freedom, the people would begin becoming complacent again and the cycle would repeat. This was also the era in which the people "did what was right in their own eyes" (Judges 21:25) versus following the commandments of the Lord. *Note: Many verses were omitted in the reading. Since this is a more comprehensive study of the Scriptures we have included all of the verses between verses 1 and 19.*

1 Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD before Eli. And word from the LORD was rare in those days, visions were infrequent. 2 It happened at that time as Eli was lying down in his place (now his eyesight had begun to grow dim and he could not see well), 3 and the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD where the ark of God was, 4 that the LORD called Samuel; and he said, "Here I am." 5 Then he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call, lie down again." So he went and lay down. 6 The LORD called yet again, "Samuel!" So Samuel arose and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he answered, "I did not call, my son, lie down again." 7 Now Samuel did not yet

know the LORD, nor had the word of the LORD yet been revealed to him. 8 So the LORD called Samuel again for the third time. And he arose and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli discerned that the LORD was calling the boy. 9 And Eli said to Samuel, "Go lie down, and it shall be if He calls you, that you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for Your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. 10 Then the LORD came and stood and called as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for Your servant is listening." 11 The LORD said to Samuel, "Behold, I am about to do a thing in Israel at which both ears of everyone who hears it will tingle. 12 "In that day I will carry out against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. 13 "For I have told him that I am about to judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knew, because his sons brought a curse on themselves and he did not rebuke them. 14 "Therefore I have sworn to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever." 15 So Samuel lay down until morning. Then he opened the doors of the house of the LORD. But Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli. 16 Then Eli called Samuel and said, "Samuel, my son." And he said, "Here I am." 17 He said, "What is the word that He spoke to you? Please do not hide it from me. May God do so to you, and more also, if you hide anything from me of all the words that He spoke to you." 18 So Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him. And he said, "It is the LORD; let Him do what seems good to Him." 19 Thus Samuel grew and the LORD was with him and let none of his words fail. (1 Samuel 3:1-19)

This is the story of young Samuel's initiation into the office of Prophet. He wasn't familiar with how the revelation of the Lord was going to come since "the word of the Lord was rare in those days" (v. 1). At first, Samuel didn't recognize God's voice and instead thought that it was Eli the high priest who was calling him. Finally, Samuel listened to the Lord and, as a result of what God told him, he had to convey a very difficult message to Eli. This must have been a challenging task and a sort of test for this young man to undertake since what Samuel told Eli was very somber news. Samuel had to convey the message that nobody in Eli's family line would continue in their priestly duties forever (14). God had already revealed to Eli that there would be judgment upon him for his lack of restraint on his wicked sons (1 Samuel 2:27-36). This was the final confirmation that the prophecy would come to pass. As a result of all of this, God officially confirmed Samuel as a prophet as we see in the closing verse 20 (not included in the reading. "All Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was confirmed as a prophet of the LORD" (1 Samuel 3:20).

Some important lessons that we learn from this passage include:

- God will fulfill His promises, whether they be blessings or curses. If this is the case, a point of application is to be aware of God's promises and live in light of these realities.
- God spoke through the prophets to disclose ultimate reality for those of us who are finite. While this might have felt harsh at the time, it was actually for humankind's good to know the Truth. Some of the prophetic utterances were divinely inspired to became part of our Holy Scriptures (1 Peter 1:21). These Truths can be heeded or rejected while we are here on earth. But God discloses these ultimate things so that we might live as wise people here and now.
- Because we can trust God's Word, it's important for us to study in light of the truth He has

revealed to us. We see this in Samuel's life as he learned to listen and even to do difficult things in order to follow God's voice.

The second reading is from Saint Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. Saint Paul wrote this letter in response to several matters that were happening in the church including sexual sin, improper celebration of communion, and lawsuits between believers. This particular section is focusing upon the sexual liberties that some people were taking. The City of Corinth was known for temple prostitution and all forms of promiscuous sexual practices related to pagan worship. Some of these people were now converted and part of the church but did not understand proper behavior in light of their new status in Christ (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). Paul gives the overarching principle for a believer's newfound freedom in Christ in verse 12. Then he explains a particular application of that freedom. *Note: The intermediate verses that were omitted in the reading have been included in order to provide the full meaning in context.*

12 All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything. 13 Food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food, but God will do away with both of them. Yet the body is not for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body. 14 Now God has not only raised the Lord, but will also raise us up through His power. 15 Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? May it never be! 16 Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a prostitute is one body with her? For He says, "THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH." 17 But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him. 18 Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. 19 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? 20 For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body. (1 Corinthians 6:12-20)

There are three overarching principles that Paul uses to help Christians be discerning about the choices that we make. First, when contemplating one's freedom in Christ, we must consider whether this helps or hinders our relationship with God (v. 12). Paul said that all things are permissible for him but not all things are beneficial (v. 12). The second main point is that when we are united in Christ we are one with Him in Spirit; therefore, when we sin we drag Him into any sinful patterns that we engage in (v. 17). This should help us to consider how our choices affect Christ, not just ourselves. The third overarching principle to help us be discerning in our freedom is the fact that our bodies are a temple of the Holy Spirit; therefore we are to honor God with our bodies (19-20). All of these points put together provide a very strong deterrent when we are attempted to go back into immoral and sinful patterns. We are not only encouraged to resist sexual immorality but Paul actually calls us to flee from it.

Way back in 2002 I was leading a Bible study and I made an offhanded comment about how all of us are hypocrites at heart in one way or another. After class a woman who heard my comment gently

confronted me about this comment and said, "No, not everyone is a hypocrite and you were wrong in making that statement." Her words cut me to the heart because like David who was confronted by the Prophet Nathan (2 Samuel 12:1-13) I was deeply disturbed by her words. This was because at that instant I realized for the very first time in my life that I had been addicted to viewing pornographic images for many years. After I left the class I poured my heart out to God and a strange thing happened. Over the course of the next several weeks I realized that my attraction and compulsive desire to look at pornography was gone. Two weeks went by without an incident, then three, then a month, then two months. After about six months I began to think that I needed to take precautions in my life because even though God delivered me it would be possible for me to go back into the cycles of viewing pornography, which involves feeling bad about it and destroying it, staying away from it for a week or two, then inevitably returning to it to begin the cycle all over again. These cycles were actually very similar to what we read about in the first reading in the era of the judges. I am very thankful to the work that God did in my life on that day in 2002, and greatly respect the woman for the courage that she showed in confronting me that day.

People, and especially men, fly around like insects and get caught in webs: lies, pornography, alcohol, stealing, and lusting after loose women. Are we so naïve to think we are like the bees who have stronger wings and can brush through these webs without getting caught in them? Unlike the cobwebs that we just brush off as we walk by, we cannot do this so easily with the complex webs (temptations) that we live in today. For many, these webs may start out only as an annoyance, slowing their progress, but later on they become like glue, binding them. God tells us "For the power of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). "And lead us not into temptation" (Matthew 6:13 you read every week in Mass, you may not realize that God really does provide the power to you to stop your sinful, compulsive behavior, whatever it may be. God stands at the door ready to deliver us from our temptations, and I am living proof. If you are struggling with your own temptations and not feeling any relief I urge you to connect with a brother or sister in the Lord and confide in them about the struggle that you are having. Then turn to the Lord in prayer, together, and outright ask for God to deliver you from your temptation. I don't know how He will respond, but you can be guaranteed that He will answer your prayer in the best way possible for your benefit.

The Gospel reading is from John Chapter 1. The context is Jesus' gathering of His disciples after His baptism by John the Baptist. From this passage, we see that John the Baptist and his disciples recognized Jesus' identity as Messiah early on in His ministry.

35 Again the next day John was standing with two of his disciples, 36 and he looked at Jesus as He walked, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" 37 The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. 38 And Jesus turned and saw them following, and said to them, "What do you seek?" They said to Him, "Rabbi (which translated means Teacher), where are You staying?" 39 He said to them, "Come, and you will see." So they came and saw where He was staying; and they stayed with Him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. 40 One of the two who heard John speak and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. 41 He found first his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which translated means Christ). 42 He brought him to Jesus. Jesus

looked at him and said, "You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter). (John 1:35-42)

John the Baptist, who was the forerunner of Jesus, declared that Jesus was the Lamb of God (v. 36). He understood that Jesus' mission as Messiah would entail becoming the atoning sacrifice for the sin of the world (v. 29), thus becoming the sacrificial lamb of God. Even though Jesus had never gone through formal "rabbinical training" they still recognized Jesus as a rabbi. The word means "teacher" (v. 38). One of the first disciples was Andrew who found his brother Simon and told him about his discovery of the long awaited Messiah. It is very significant that when Simon recognized Jesus as Messiah one of the first things He did was to announce a name change for Simon to Cephas. This almost indicates a type of covenantal relationship with Peter that consisted of a name change and Jesus obvious vision of who Peter would became later in his ministry, the "rock." While Peter did not characterize rock-like qualities throughout the Gospels, Jesus called him by his new name, thus calling him to a higher level of living than what he had previously known.

Each of the readings this week point to the fact that God has a vision for who we can become if we surrender our lives to Him. Samuel became the prophet, the Corinthians became purified, and Peter became the Rock. What's God's vision for you? Read the following excerpt about God's vision for who you are in Christ. See if these truths counteract any of the webs you find yourself falling into.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

(refer to the next page)

Truth that Counteracts Lies:

"The list below itemizes in first-person language who you really are in Christ. These are some of the scriptural traits which reflect who you became at spiritual birth. You can't earn them or buy them any more than a person born in the United States can earn or buy the rights and freedoms enjoyed as an American citizen. They are guaranteed to the person by the Constitution simply because he or she was born in the United States. Similarly, these traits are guaranteed to you by the Word of God simply because you were born into God's holy nation by faith in Christ." (Source: Anderson, N. T. (2000). Victory over the darkness. Ventura, CA: Regal books. p. 51)

I Am Accepted:

John 1:12 I am God's child.

John 15:15	I am Christ's friend.
Romans 5:1	I have been justified.
1 Cor. 6:17	I am united with the Lord, and I am one spirit with Him.
1 Cor. 6:20	I have been bought with a price. I belong to God.
1 Cor. 12:27	I am a member of Christ's Body.
Eph. 1:1	I am a saint.
Eph. 1:5	I have been adopted as God's child.
Eph. 2:18	I have direct access to God through the Holy Spirit.
Col. 1:14	I have been redeemed and forgiven of all my sins.
Col. 2:10	I am complete in Christ.

I Am Secure:

Rom. 8:1-2	I am free from condemnation.
Rom. 8:28	I am assured that all things work together for good.
Rom. 8:31-34	I am free from any condemning charges against me.
Rom. 8:35-39	I cannot be separated from the love of God.
2 Cor. 1:21-22	I have been established, anointed and sealed by God.
Phil. 1:6	I am confident that the good work God has begun in me will be perfected.
Col. 3:3	I am hidden with Christ in God.
2 Tim. 1:7	I have not been given a spirit of fear, but of power, love and a sound mind.
1 John 5:18	I am born of God and the evil one cannot touch me.

I Am Significant:

Matt. 5:13-14	I am the salt and light of the earth.
John 15:1-5	I am a branch of the true vine, a channel of His life.

John 15:16	I have been chosen and appointed to bear fruit.
Acts 1:8	I am a personal witness of Christ.
1 Cor. 3:16	I am God's temple.
2 Cor. 5:17-21	I am a minister of reconciliation for God.
2 Cor. 6:1	I am God's coworker (see 1 Cor. 3:9).
Eph. 2:6	I am seated with Christ in the heavenly realm.
Eph. 2:10	I am God's workmanship.
Eph. 3:12	I may approach God with freedom and confidence. (Source: Anderson, pp. 38-39).

"Understanding your identity in Christ is essential for living the Christian life. People cannot consistently behave in ways that are inconsistent with the way they perceive themselves. You don't change yourself by your perception. You change your perception of yourself by believing the truth. If you perceive yourself wrongly, you will live wrongly because what you are believing is not true. Next to a knowledge of God, a knowledge of who you are is by far the most important truth you can possess." (Source: Anderson, p. 47)

Interaction:

1. Look at the list and star one that you sense is very well ingrained in your way of thinking and acting in the midst of unwanted transitions.
2. Circle one that you sense needs God's help to become more real in your life during unwanted transitions. You may understand it cognitively, but your life fails to reflect the reality of that truth.

1. Spend some time in prayer asking the Lord to show you more of His vision for who you are in Christ.

1. If you haven't come to the place in your life where you have placed your trust wholly in the Lord Jesus Christ for your forgiveness of sin and you would like to do so you can turn to God in prayer and ask Him to change your heart just as He changed the people that were in the passages we just read.

Readings for the Week

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Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass visit this web site: http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/011815.cfm

First Reading 1 SM 3:3B-10, 19

Second Reading 1 COR 6:13C-15A, 17-20

Gospel Reading JN 1:35-42

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 12-21-2014



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for 12-21-2014. This week we open with the first reading from the Book of Second Samuel chapter 7. Then we move to the second reading from Paul's Letter to the Romans and conclude with the Gospel lesson from the Gospel of Saint Luke. Christmas is only four days from this Sunday's lesson so we pray that all of you have a very Merry Christmas.

The first reading is from the Book of Second Samuel. This is the second Book following First Samuel,

and was originally one Book until the separation made by the translators of the Greek Old Testament known as the Septuagint. First and Second Samuel were written by an unknown author and chronicled the events from the birth of the Prophet Samuel (1 Samuel 1:1-28) until the last words of King David (2 Samuel 23:1-7). First Samuel opens with a description of the corruption of the Levitical priesthood (1 Samuel 2:12-17) and the threats from Israel's main enemy the Philistines who captured the Ark of the Covenant (1 Samuel 4). One of the main things that happened in these two Books was the pronouncement by God of the Davidic Covenant. This is the Covenant which is God's promises to David made through Nathan and found in 2 Samuel 7, the text of today's reading.

Note: The intervening verses that were skipped in the reading were included below in order to provide the full context and meaning.

> *1 Now it came about when the king lived in his house, and the LORD had given him rest on every side from all his enemies, 2 that the king said to Nathan the prophet, "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells within tent curtains." 3 Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that is in your mind, for the LORD is with you." 4 But in the same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan, saying, 5 "Go and say to My servant David, 'Thus says the LORD, "Are you the one who should build Me a house to dwell in? 6 For I have not dwelt in a house since the day I brought up the sons of Israel from Egypt, even to this day; but I have been moving about in a tent, even in a tabernacle. 7 Wherever I have gone with all the sons of Israel, did I speak a word with one of the tribes of Israel, which I commanded to shepherd My people Israel, saying, 'Why have you not built Me a house of cedar?'"' 8 "Now therefore, thus you shall say to My servant David, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts, "I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, to be ruler over My people Israel. 9 I have been with you wherever you have gone and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make you a great name, like the names of the great men who are on the earth. 10 I will also appoint a place for My people Israel and will plant them, that they may live in their own place and not be disturbed again, nor will the wicked afflict them any more as formerly, 11 even from the day that I commanded judges to be over My people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. The LORD also declares to you that the LORD will make a house for you. 12 When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. 13 He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. 14 I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me; when he commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men, 15 but My lovingkindness shall not depart from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. 16 Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever."'" (2 Samuel 7:1-16).*

According the rules given the Moses the Lord's dwelling place was in the tabernacle, but King David desired to build a temple for God (v. 2). Nathan the Prophet told David instead that the Lord would make a house for him (v. 11) and that his descendent (whom we know was his son Solomon) would be the one to build the temple of God (vv. 12-13). The promises from God to David as relayed by the

Prophet Nathan included first, that David would have rest from his enemies (v. 11), that his descendent would build a temple of God (vv. 12-13), and finally that the "throne of David" would be established forever (v. 13 b). We understand that after God later revealed the mystery (as we will see in the second reading), the One who would sit upon the throne wasn't King David's son Solomon, but the Lord Jesus Himself. Verse 14 is a description of Jesus' Second Advent, the coming rulership of Jesus during his coming earthly reign as we see confirmed by Revelation 12:5, "And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up to God and to His throne." Israel is the one who gave birth to Jesus, and at His First Advent He was taken up into heaven (Acts 1:9). Jesus is the One that will sit on the Throne of David. Although Mary was the earthly host of Jesus, He was born as a child of the Nation of Israel, "a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars" (Revelation 12:1). Jesus is the Messiah of the Jews, and through the mystery of the church the Messiah of the Gentiles as well.

As you were reading the verses from 2 Samuel, it can be confusing as to whether the author was speaking about King David or the coming Messiah, the Son of David. The people in King David's era hearing about Samuel's prophecies may have desired to see David's greater son and believed that somehow Solomon would reign forever. However, Jesus is the One called the Son of David. In the opening of Matthew's Gospel Jesus is called the Son of David (Matthew 1:1). Later in Matthew Chapter 9 two blind men called out, "Have mercy on us Son of David" (Matthew 9:27). Even those that doubted knew Jesus' identity. At one point after Jesus had performed great miracles the crowd called out, "this man cannot be the Son of David, can he?" (Matthew 12:23b). When Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday the crowd cried out, "Hosanna to the Son of David; BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD; Hosanna in the highest!" (Matthew 21:9). Jesus had a messianic title, and was the One to whom was promised His reign would endure forever (2 Samuel 7:13).

As we celebrate Christmas just four days from today, this is the Royal Person that we commemorate being born in the manger, where all ceremonial lambs are born. After Jesus' resurrection, He "sat down at the right hand of the Father" (Hebrews 10:12), "having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time" (ibid). He is "waiting from that time onward UNTIL HIS ENEMIES BE MADE A FOOTSTOOL FOR HIS FEET" (Hebrews 10:13). "For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified" (Hebrews 10:13). Paul said that salvation is a free gift that comes through faith. "8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). No matter how hard we try, Jesus' work is still finished for us. We walk in the strength of God's power for His purposes as we see in the very next verse of Ephesians. "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). As believers we have been sealed by the Holy Spirit, as Paul said in Chapter 1 of Ephesians. "In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation–having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise" (Ephesians 1:13). These are the spiritual truths that we are celebrating during Christmas.

As we move onto the second reading from the closing version of the Paul's Letter to the Romans, we see that the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus was the fulfillment of a great mystery that wasn't understood until after He came. The Gospel of Jesus Christ was something that was hidden in the former times, but is now understood, a mystery revealed by God through Jesus Christ.

> *25 Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, 26 but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith; 27 to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen. (Romans 16:25-27)*

The Good News (or Gospel) is appointed as a light to all the nations (v. 26d) which leads to the obedience of faith (v. 26e). Although this was a mystery in the ages past (v. 25b) it was manifested both by the many prophetic verses in the Scriptures and through the voice of the Prophets as we saw in the first reading. Paul said more about this mystery Ephesians:

> *2 if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you; 3 that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. 4 By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; (Ephesians 3:2-5)*

The salvation of the Gentiles through Jesus' sacrifice and the church age was a mystery that wasn't revealed until after Jesus came. Although the prophecies were there concerning the in-grafting of the Gentiles into God's kingdom (see for example Isaiah 56:6-8 "foreigners," the salvation of the Gentile Rahab in Joshua 2:9-11, the salvation of the Ninevites in the Book of Jonah). Isaiah was more explicit about this coming salvation for the Gentiles. He said about Jesus, the Root of Jesse, "And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse, Who shall stand as a banner to the people; For the Gentiles shall seek Him, And His resting place shall be glorious" (Isaiah 11:10). Again, these are the spiritual truths that we celebrate during Christmas

The Gospel lesson is from Saint Luke and records the miraculous event of the birth of Jesus to the Virgin Mary.

> *26 Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth, 27 to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. 28 And coming in, he said to her, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." 29 But she was very perplexed at this statement, and kept pondering what kind of salutation this was. 30 The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God. 31 And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; 33 and He will reign*

> *over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end." 34 Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" 35 The angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God. 36 And behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age; and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month. 37 For nothing will be impossible with God." 38 And Mary said, "Behold, the bondslave of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her. (Luke 1:26-38)*

Many points arise from the reading. First, Mary is called the "favored one" in verse 28. She said about herself later in this chapter, "For He has had regard for the humble state of His bondslave; For behold, from this time on all generations will count me blessed" (Luke 1:48). One can hardly imaging the calling which God placed her to be the bearer of the Son of God. In the reading, God called Mary who found favor with God who was to be the bearer of God's Son Jesus who would through the "ark" (see below) of His bodily sacrifice save the world from their sin. Jesus was conceived not through normal human means but through the virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit (v. 34). Mary, was obviously very perplexed at all that was happening and called out to the Angel to explain these things (v. 34), who was more than glad to do so. Second, Mary's Son would be called "the Son of God" (v. 35) and the Lord would give to him the throne of David (v. 32), the fulfillment of the prophecy that we saw in the first reading. Finally, Mary (and Joseph) were obedient to God in naming their Son Jesus, and Mary promised her obedience to God by calling herself "bondslave of the Lord" (v. 37). By the way, Jesus is from the Hebrew name "Jeshua," which means "the Lord is Salvation." Jesus is the salvation of the entire world, which is why we are so pleased to celebrate His birth on Christmas.

Noah, who came centuries before, was also called "blessed", and it was through the righteous and faithful acts of Noah that the world was saved from the flood. God said, "But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD" (Genesis 6:8). Noah built an ark to save the people of the world from the wrath of God that was to literally be poured out through the Flood. The Blessed Mary on the other hand, bore the Son of God to be the ark of salvation for all who would believe. These similarities between Noah and Mary are important because they show how these two people were obedient to the difficult callings that God placed upon their lives. Although it's okay to ask questions when we discern the calling that God places upon **our** lives, it's also crucially important as believers to carry out His instructions.

While many of us are already familiar with the narrative concerning the birth of Jesus, this passage highlights important truths for our lives. First, Saint Luke brought out the fact that Jesus was born not through natural human relations but through the supernatural working of the Holy Spirit. This is important because since God is without sin this was the only means by which the sinless God-Man could come into the world. Second, since the virgin birth was a fulfillment of biblical prophecy we can trust other prophecies that speak to areas of our life and ministry. This includes things like how the second coming of the Lord will play out, how the world will be eventually unified under Jesus' earthly reign. Third, Jesus was sent to save His people from their sins. This is God's special

invitation to counteract the destructive nature of sin in order to stand before a Holy God and not be rejected at the judgment. This is not only "a" plan for salvation, it is "the" plan. Jesus said, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life, no man comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

May you and your family have a very Merry Christmas.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. In the first reading, what began as a promise that David's son (we know as Solomon) would build a temple for God (v. 13a) expanded into a throne that would endure forever (v. 13b). The temple is a place where people gather to worship God, and in the Old Testament was a place inside of which God's Spirit dwelled. We know the ruler of the temple is Jesus forever, but how can the throne of the temple endure forever, when we know that it was destroyed in 586 BC and again in AD70?

2. In light of your answer to the first question, read what Saint Paul had to say in the Letters to the Corinthians. "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?" (1Corinthians 6:19). "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (1 Corinthians 3:16). "And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: 'I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people'" (2 Corinthians 6:16).

How would you change your answer in light of the spiritual truth that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit on which Jesus is (and will) reign forever?

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/122114.cfm

First Reading 2 SM 7:1-5, 8B-12, 14A, 16

Second Reading ROM 16:25-27

Gospel Reading LK 1:26-38

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

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Mass Study Notes for Sunday 3-30-2014



Welcome back to the Mass Notes for 3-30-2014. This week we begin with the Book of First Samuel where we will see how God used Samuel to select David as the King of Israel. Then we will move onto Saint Paul's Letter to the Ephesians and finally close with the Gospel lesson from Saint John Chapter 9 where Jesus miraculously heals a blind man. I also share a story about how God "unblinded" my eyes to be able to understand the Bible.

The first reading is from First Samuel 16 and records the story of how the Prophet Samuel followed God's instructions in order to select the second King of Israel to replace King Saul whom God had rejected. Immediately after Saul was ordained king he began disobeying very clear and direct orders from God provided to him by Samuel. In Chapter 15 Samuel gave Saul clear prophesy from the LORD which said "Now go and strike Amalek and utterly destroy all that he has, and do not spare him; but put to death both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey" (1Samuel 15:3). Saul gathered his troops together and followed God's command *except* for some rather large details. "But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all that was good, and were not willing to destroy them utterly; but everything despised and worthless, that they utterly destroyed" (v. 9). Oops. Because of this (and the other times Saul disobeyed) God took the kingdom away from him saying, "I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following Me and has not carried out My commands" (v.11a).

The text continued, "And Samuel was distressed and cried out to the LORD all night" (v.11b). So Samuel began to make his search for the new king by following God's order to go to Jesse who was David's father. Let's read the text along with all of the other verses surrounding the reading (verses 1-13) in order to understand the entire context.

> *1 Now the LORD said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul, since I have rejected him from being king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and go; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have selected a king for Myself among his sons." 2 But Samuel said, "How can I go? When Saul hears of it, he will kill me." And the LORD said, "Take a heifer with you and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.' 3 You shall invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for Me the one whom I designate to you." 4 So Samuel did what the LORD said, and came to Bethlehem. And the elders of the city came trembling to meet him and said, "Do you come in peace?" 5 He said, "In peace; I have come to sacrifice to the LORD. Consecrate yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice." He also consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice. 6 When they entered, he looked at Eliab and thought, "Surely the LORD'S anointed is before Him." 7 But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." 8 Then Jesse called Abinadab and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, "The LORD has not chosen this one either." 9 Next Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, 'The LORD has not chosen this one either." 10 Thus Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel. But Samuel said to Jesse, "The LORD has not chosen these." 11 And Samuel said to Jesse, "Are these all the children?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, and behold, he is tending the sheep." Then Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here." 12 So he sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, with beautiful eyes and a handsome appearance. And the LORD said, "Arise, anoint him; for this is he." 13 Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward. And Samuel arose and went to Ramah. (1 Samuel 16:1-13)*

It's interesting that Samuel was afraid of King Saul since even the elders of the city were afraid of him (v. 4). However, the text recorded not only the story and circumstantial details of the search for the future king but also Samuel's thoughts (v.2). We know of course that God knows all of the secret thoughts of our hearts (Psalm 44:21) and this became even clearer by what we saw in verse 7. "[F]or God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart" (v.7c-ff). God directed the Prophet not to rely upon the outward appearance of the Sons of Jesse; rather he was to wait for God's confirmation. Regardless of his feelings, Samuel followed God's directions exactly and went to David's hometown of Bethlehem.

First, Samuel surveyed the eldest son; the one whom one may think would be the logical choice from among the large clan of Jesse's sons. Eliab passed before him and Samuel didn't receive any confirmation from God. He proceeded on down the line, next with Abinadab, then with Shammah, and down the line with the brothers. Nevertheless, God did not confirm any of them, so Samuel

asked Jesse if there were any more brothers. Jesse then sent for his youngest son David (v. 11). The writer of this Scripture then made an interesting observation. After being cautioned not to look on the sons' outward appearance the writer said immediately upon seeing David, "Now he was ruddy, with beautiful eyes and a handsome appearance (v. 12b)! Next, the LORD spoke to Samuel. How this was done we are not told. He directed Samuel to annoint David as king (v.12c-ff). So Samuel followed God's command and anointed David as the new King of Israel (v.13a).

The New Testament Bible records that King David was a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22). What does it mean to be a person after God's own heart? First, the reading said, "the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward" (v. 13b). God empowers believers through His Holy Spirit Who indwells everyone that has been born from above (John 3:3). Second, we must submit ourselves to the Lord by being obedient to Him (James 4:7). One of the main stumbling stones that we may have in submission to God is pride. Saint Peter said, "You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE" (1 Peter 5:5). Finally, we must develop a love for the Word of God. King David said the following about this in the Book of Psalms. "I shall delight in Your commandments, Which I love. And I shall lift up my hands to Your commandments, Which I love; And I will meditate on Your statutes" (Psalms 119:47-48).

The second reading today is from Saint Paul's Letter to the Ephesians. As you read, insert your name in place of the "you" in the second word of verse 8, and rephrase it like this. "For Jim, who was formerly in darkness . . . .

> *8 for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light 9 (for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), 10 trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. 11 Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; 12 for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret. 13 But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light. 14 For this reason it says, "Awake, sleeper, And arise from the dead, And Christ will shine on you." (Ephesians 5:8-14)*

Paul said that those who were blind are now able to see (v.8). Believers are "children of light" (v.8) as contrasted with children of darkness (or children of the devil) that we will read about in the Gospel lesson. God's children exhibit clear attributes and behaviors that reveal their "light relationship" with their Father God. This is in contrast to the children of darkness who express themselves, many times without even knowing it, as children of the devil. Children of the light express "goodness and righteousness and truth" (v.9), try "to learn what is pleasing to the Lord" (v.10), "do not participate in unfruitful deeds of darkness" but instead work to "expose them" (v.11). God, who is the light, exposes everything, for nothing can be hidden from Him (v.13). When we come to a point where we believe and agree with what God says about sin then we have followed God's admonition to awaken from our spiritual darkness so that the light of the Word of God may enable God to launch us on a path of growing in love for and knowledge of Him (4.14).

What if we cannot read the Bible and understand what it means, or if we don't have a desire to even attempt to study it? This week I was contemplating the subject of understanding and coming to the point of loving God's Word. I remember that for the first 35 years of my life, I had an almost impossible time understanding the Bible, this included the New Testament – the Old Testament was a lost cause for me. In fact, when I decided almost 20 years ago to begin reading the Bible I became angry while reading the Old Testament. I thought that since Jesus was eternal that it would be easy for me to locate Him there in the Old Testament. It just didn't make any sense to me, no matter how hard I tried to concentrate. Something had to happen in order to bring about a change or I felt like I was going to throw it away and just quit. What made the difference for me? It wasn't a magical, one-time event, but the change came as a series of impressions I got while I was praying over the course of about a month long period. I had always prayed to God but at some point while reading in the New Testament, I came to the point where I prayed something like this, again, over a period of several weeks. I told God that I believed that I was a sinner (Romans 3:23) and I deserved punishment for sin (Romans 6:23). I told Him that I believed that Jesus was the only way to heaven (John 14:6) and that I needed His Spirit (John 3:3) to help me to fix the mess that I had made of my life. After a long period of praying to God about this, as well as talking to a few other people about it, I had an eerie encounter with Jesus late one night in my bedroom. In those days, I was living in an upscale condominium in a large city surrounded by the nightlife only a few blocks up Main Street, but I had never felt more alone. I turned off all of the lights and closed the door to my bedroom to pray in silence while laying on my bed. I was frustrated with my inability to live up to my high standards, which included trying to go to church more and party less. After I began praying I felt a tangible presence of Jesus in my dark bedroom that night. In the quiet darkness and with my eyes closed more tightly than I thought possible, I extended my hand to Him over the side of the bed. Although I didn't expect for my hand to be physically grabbed, for I would have freaked out, I sensed the strong presence of Jesus in the room with me during that instant. From that night onwards, I felt a certain presence of God in my heart, something which is hard for me to put into words. However, some days later I noticed that I could read the Bible with understanding and without getting angry, as had happened in the past.

I still have difficulty in reading a variety of books but have come to the point that I find joy in reading the Bible. Last week I downloaded the free version of Saint Augustine's Confession onto my Kindle, thinking that by reading this I would gain some important spiritual insights and become a more godly man. I'm ashamed to say that I couldn't make it through one entire page. The Elizabethan English didn't help, but I'm just not a philosopher. Sometimes we need to understand and accept our limits.

What about you, do you desire to have a deeper understanding of the Bible? I encourage you to fall on your knees in prayer and ask God to grant both the understanding and the desire. Is there something standing between you and God? The Scripture says that if you confess your sins God is faithful and just to forgive your sins and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). Scripture also says that we don't have because we don't ask and sometimes when we do ask God doesn't give it to us because we ask with a false motive (James 4:2-3). Everyone, as Jesus explained to Nicodemus, must be born from above (John 3:3) in a spiritual sense. If you don't feel that you

have the spiritual discernment necessary to read God's Word, just ask Him for it, but ask with the proper motive. This is a motive of desiring to turn from your sin and to serve the living and true God (1 Thessalonians 1:9).

To summarize, in the first and second reading we discussed how God "unblinded" the minds of people. First, Samuel was "unblinded" to the identity of the future King of Israel, King David. Second, Paul wrote about how believers are "unblinded" to the reality of sin and even work to expose it. As we move onto the Gospel lesson we will find a story about how Jesus healed a blind man, and this person also received spiritual eyesight through his belief in the Lord Jesus. Jesus did this miracle on the Sabbath, something that set him further at odds with the hypocritical Pharisees.

A very interesting insight regarding the topic of blindness can be found by studying the context of the Gospel lesson immediately prior in Chapter 8. Here Jesus had a very difficult conversation with His nemesis the Pharisees, a conflict that continues into the lesson today in Chapter 9. Jesus pronounced the source of their logic after they began to accuse Him and He read their minds and told them that they wanted to kill Him. When the Pharisees said that Abraham was their father (John 8:39) Jesus said, "You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44). Next, they accused Jesus of having a demon. This led to Jesus making one of His famous "I Am" statements. "Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am'" (v. 58). This powerful statement was an outright testimony by Jesus to his deity (see also John 10:30). Finally, in the very last verse of Chapter 8 John wrote, "Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him, but Jesus **hid Himself** and went out of the temple" (v. 59, emphasis added). Notice that Jesus "hid himself," which is another way of looking at it was that he blinded the Pharisees.

As you read the lesson today, notice that Jesus' first action was to "unblind" a blind man. Think of it like this: First, he blinded the *proud* Pharisees, then he "unblinded" a *humble* blind man.

> *1 As He passed by, He saw a man blind from birth. 2 And His disciples asked Him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?" 3 Jesus answered, "It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was so that the works of God might be displayed in him. 4 "We must work the works of Him who sent Me as long as it is day; night is coming when no one can work. 5 "While I am in the world, I am the Light of the world." 6 When He had said this, He spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and applied the clay to his eyes, 7 and said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which is translated, Sent). So he went away and washed, and came back seeing. 8 Therefore the neighbors, and those who previously saw him as a beggar, were saying, "Is not this the one who used to sit and beg?" 9 Others were saying, "This is he," still others were saying, "No, but he is like him." He kept saying, "I am the one." 10 So they were saying to him, "How then were your eyes opened?" 11 He answered, "The man who is called Jesus made clay, and anointed my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash'; so I went away and washed, and I received sight." 12 They said to him, "Where is He?" He *said, "I do not know." 13 They *brought to*

> *the Pharisees the man who was formerly blind. 14 Now it was a Sabbath on the day when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes. 15 Then the Pharisees also were asking him again how he received his sight. And he said to them, "He applied clay to my eyes, and I washed, and I see." 16 Therefore some of the Pharisees were saying, "This man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath." But others were saying, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And there was a division among them. 17 So they *said to the blind man again, "What do you say about Him, since He opened your eyes?" And he said, "He is a prophet." 18 The Jews then did not believe it of him, that he had been blind and had received sight, until they called the parents of the very one who had received his sight, 19 and questioned them, saying, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? Then how does he now see?" 20 His parents answered them and said, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; 21 but how he now sees, we do not know; or who opened his eyes, we do not know. Ask him; he is of age, he will speak for himself." 22 His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone confessed Him to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue. 23 For this reason his parents said, "He is of age; ask him." 24 So a second time they called the man who had been blind, and said to him, "Give glory to God; we know that this man is a sinner." 25 He then answered, "Whether He is a sinner, I do not know; one thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." 26 So they said to him, "What did He do to you? How did He open your eyes?" 27 He answered them, "I told you already and you did not listen; why do you want to hear it again? You do not want to become His disciples too, do you?" 28 They reviled him and said, "You are His disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. 29 "We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where He is from." 30 The man answered and said to them, "Well, here is an amazing thing, that you do not know where He is from, and yet He opened my eyes. 31 "We know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is God-fearing and does His will, He hears him. 32 "Since the beginning of time it has never been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. 33 "If this man were not from God, He could do nothing." 34 They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you teaching us?" So they put him out. 35 Jesus heard that they had put him out, and finding him, He said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" 36 He answered, "Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?" 37 Jesus said to him, "You have both seen Him, and He is the one who is talking with you." 38 And he said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped Him. 39 And Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, so that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind." 40 Those of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these things and said to Him, "We are not blind too, are we?" 41 Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no sin; but since you say, 'We see,' your sin remains. (John 9:1-41)*

A variety of key points emerged from the text. First, the disciples believed that the physical condition of the blind man was as a result of the man or his parent's sin. Jesus corrected this false believe and said that God allowed this condition so that he could be healed during this particular event! God is sovereign over every single event in history, and He designed this whole affair to show the glory of God. Second, the healed, formerly blind man became a powerful testimony to the deity of Jesus and this further deepened the His opposition to the Pharisees. One has to like what the

formerly blind man said to the Pharisees, it's almost like something we could hear from a smart talking teenager! "Whether He is a sinner, I do not know; one thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see" (v.25). After the Pharisees had put him out of the temple (most likely permanently, see his parents warning in v. 22), Jesus came and presented Himself to him, telling the man that he was the Messiah (v. 35, "Son of Man"). The blind man believed, and then worshiped Him (v.38). Third, the Pharisees alluded to the fact that they held the same belief as the disciples about sin being the cause of physical infirmity (v. 24). Someone that was born blind clearly was a sinner, and sinners, according to the Pharisees, should have nothing to do with worship in the temple. They went on to say, "We know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is God-fearing and does His will, He hears him" (v. 32).

This powerful story concluded with some of the most intense teaching ever found in the New Testament. Read the conclusion again very carefully.

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One time I was reading a certain spiritual book called *The Complete Green Letters* by Miles J. Stanford (Zondervan 1984). This book contains many very powerful sections that I copiously underlined and highlighted, probably adding a half a pound to the book just for the weight of it all! I found one particular page to be so moving and important that I just wrote a note at the top of the page and highlighted the note in yellow that said, "Consider this entire page highlighted!" The last three verses of the Gospel lesson are like that – consider the whole section highlighted! Jesus' statement is the essence of the Gospel message. Jesus said that He came into the world to reveal the two groups of people, those on the narrow road to life and those on the broad road to eternal separation from God (Matthew 7:13). In a spiritual sense, there are two types of people, children of God the Father and the rest, by default, children of the devil. The children of the light have spiritual vision, but the children of the darkness are spiritually blind. Saint Paul said:

> *3 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, 4 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).*

Consider this whole quotation highlighted! There is no more crucial distinction between people than whether they have spiritual vision or are spiritually blind. Jesus, through His divine grace, came to show us the difference. He calls us to repent of our sins and to believe that He is the Messiah of the universe. As we approach Easter let's all us pray that we may be God's light to a lost and dying world that badly needs the spiritual vision that can come only through the good news of the Gospel and believe in Jesus Christ as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

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Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. How have you been "unblinded" to the spiritual truths of the Bible? Consider submitting a brief testimony of to the Christians for Christ web site: http://www.christiansforchrist.org/personal-testimonies

2. Frequently when someone brings up King David our mind automatically jumps to the story about his indiscretion with Bathsheba (see 2 Samuel 11). In reality this is similar to what the Pharisees did to Jesus by accusing the formerly blind man of being a sinner, and glossing over the great miracle of his healing – though they said that this type of healing had never been seen before.

A. Do you catch yourself being a Pharisee overlooking the heart and focusing upon minor, outward faults in yourself and others?

B. How does knowing that God looks on the heart change how you evaluate what's important in your own life and in relationship with others.

C. Ask God to reveal to you in what areas you are glossing over God's goodness in a certain person and missing His heart for them.

3. How could you reach out to someone who hasn't experienced the miraculous gift of God's spiritual healing?