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, 11-1-2015



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **11-1-2015**. This week we open with a reading from the mysterious Book of Revelation where we will explain in detail some of the background and context to bring out the meaning of the text. Then we move to another reading written by John from the Book of First John. Then we close with the Gospel lesson from Saint Matthew from the section called the Beatitudes. I remember reading those passages many years ago in Mass and feeling that I needed to be a better person and to try harder to please God. Find out what God's Word says about my feelings and what would have been a more biblical response to them.

I know someone that has been a Christian for a very long time while a certain uncle of hers was resistant to believing in Jesus Christ right up until near the end of his life. As he grew older, he steadfastly refused to bow his knee to Jesus Christ although almost everyone around him were followers of Jesus including his niece who told me the story, and her husband was a pastor. One night he went to bed expecting to awaken the next morning just like every other day. However, God had a different plan for him. As I was a new believer in Jesus Christ myself when I heard this story I remember how it profoundly impacted me as I listened with baited breath about what was going to happen next. The next morning when the man arose and looked at himself in the mirror, he found a depression in the bone of his forehead in the shape of a cross. He instantly recognized this as a miracle as a seal of God calling him to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ which he quickly obeyed. As others encountered him throughout the last years of his life, he testified of God's grace in marking him in this unique way such that he could no longer deny the one and only Savior Jesus Christ. This marking remained on his forehead for the rest of his life as a seal or marking of him as a follower of Jesus Christ. This week we will read about how God will in some future day "seal" a group of Jews in order to protect them from the wrath of the Antichrist who like many others before

him will persecute God's chosen people.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Book of Revelation. This Book tells the story of the unfurling of a series of judgments upon the world culminating with what the Old Testament calls the "Day of the Lord." Throughout the Book, John moves his focus back and forth from events happening upon the earth and those in heaven with frequent parenthesis (or pauses) in the chronological progression of events. Understanding of Revelation requires a thorough understanding of the Old Testament and especially the Book of Daniel. John uses much symbolic language throughout the Book, and the reader is challenged to understand the meaning behind the symbols as well as to what extent the language is meant to foretell literal events in heaven and on the earth.

In order to understand the Book of Revelation and today's reading, it is necessary to understand from a high level the primary events that will transpire during the end times. The order of the main events that will unfold are as follows. The sin of the world will grow worse and worse (Matthew 24;12), and many false christs will come. (2 Timothy 3:13, Matthew 24:5). The world will be consumed by "wars and rumors of wars," there will be "famines and earthquakes" (Matthew 24:6-7). This will mark the beginning of the end times. (Matthew 24:8) The AntiChrist will come on the scene and falsely claim to have been resurrected from the dead (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4, Revelation 13:3). A peace treaty will be made with Israel providing for resumption of animal sacrifices in a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem (Daniel 9:27). Large-scale persecution of believers will escalate leading many false believers to fall away (Revelation 13:7, Matthew 13:9-10). This point marks the unfurling of the scroll of the first six seals of Revelation. As the AntiChrist rules the world with terror, at some point the believers in God will be reunited with Christ and taken to heaven at His second coming (1 Thessalonians 4:14-18). Somewhere during this time a group of elect Jews will be protected by God as described in today's reading. The final stage will then begin with the unbelieving world left behind and then God will unleash His judgments during the final "Day of the Lord" completing the total destruction of the AntiChrist's worldly and religious empire of mystery Babylon. This is the time when God unleashes His judgments upon the world as stated just prior to today's reading in Revelation 6:17, "for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand." At the conclusion of these events, Jesus will return to set up His reign on earth.

The particular context of today's reading in chapter 7 is the divine protection of a believing remnant of Jews alive during the time when the AntiChrist will be unleashing increasing persecution upon believers in God. God will protect this surviving remnant in order to complete His promises to them.

First Reading:

Note: Verses 5 – 8 which were omitted from the reading have been included below.

Revelation 7:2-14 NAS95 2 And I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the

seal of the living God; and he cried out with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, 3 saying, "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads." 4 And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel: 5 From the tribe of Judah, twelve thousand were sealed, from the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand, from the tribe of Gad twelve thousand, 6 from the tribe of Asher twelve thousand, from the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand, from the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand, 7 from the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand, from the tribe of Levi twelve thousand, from the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand, 8 from the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand, from the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand, from the tribe of Benjamin, twelve thousand were sealed. 9 After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; 10 and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." 11 And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, 12 saying, "Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen." 13 Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?" 14 I said to him, "My lord, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

In the days before Jesus' return (see Acts 1:11), a powerful world ruler will emerge called the AntiChrist who will persecute any believers alive during this time including both Christians and Jews. As the AntiChrist hurls his bloodshed upon the Christians, God will protect a remnant of the Jews who through this terrible persecution will come to faith in the Lord Jesus (Zechariah 12:10). To do this God grants His authority to an angel to set His mark upon this group of Jews from the twelve tribes of Israel – except that some of them were designated by different names because of the curses pronounced in the Old Testament. (Astute readers can find out more information about this by studying Deuteronomy 29:16-10). In ancient days, the kings used their signet ring to emboss a special marking into wax or clays seals that were placed upon documents in order to show their sign of authority and authenticity. In the last days of the devils reign over his current world empire, the angel of God's divine marking provides protection to the believing Jews from the wrath of the AntiChrist. The Prophet Malachi said about this, "I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him" (Malachi 3:17). Whether this is a literal number of people or it is symbolic of a large but finite number isn't readily discernible in the text. However, they will have been regathered for the opening of the rebuilt temple and the resumption of the sacrifices. During the first three and half years of the peace treaty that the AntiChrist makes with national Israel, the Jews will resume their sacrifices in a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem while large scale persecution of Christians accelerates around the world. As time moves to the midpoint of this treaty, the AntiChrist will set an image of himself up in the temple and command his worship as God (2 Thessalonians 2:4). This "abomination of desolation" (Matthew 24:15) will greatly provoke the Jews to rebel against the AntiChrist to such an extent that without God's divine protection all of them would be consumed by this evil end time ruler. It is only through this horrific series of events that unfold upon the earth that the collective

group of the Jews will finally recognize Jesus Whom they pierced (Zechariah 12:10) as their Messiah.

As the reading continues, beginning in verse 9 John changed his focus from events happening on earth to things occurring in heaven. This is one of the frequent parenthesis that occurs throughout the Book. John saw a second group of people, a "great multitude which no one could count," (v. 9) who are believing people martyred up until that point during the great tribulation. John didn't understand who these people were at first, but the angel answered his question about them by describing how they "washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (v. 14). It's not often when someone can wash their robes in blood and make them white, but that is exactly what Jesus offers to anyone who trusts in Him. Although the believers in heaven were not delivered **from** the tribulation and persecution on earth, they were delivered **through** it to be with Jesus in heaven.

What does this mean for us today? We as Christians must expect that as God's prophets we will increasingly face persecution. Jesus said, "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). Later in the Gospel reading we will see how Jesus likened the persecution of believers to the persecution of the prophets that came before them (Matthew 5:12). There Jesus said, "Blessed are you when others revile against you and persecute you." As God's persecuted prophets we can look for our fulfillment not in the things of the world but look heavenward towards our ultimate purpose in serving God. Finally, as we continue to march onwards towards the last days described in Revelation, we can expect to see a growing distinction between the true people of God and the rest of the world. The Prophet Malachi said about these days, "Then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between the one who serves God and the one who does not serve Him" (Malachi 3:18). Although we may not be saved from tribulation, we can be assured that God will deliver us through it.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from First John. The context is Saint John's teaching on the characteristics of true believers, something that we will encounter later in the Gospel lesson.

Second Reading:

1 John 3:1-3 NAS95 1 See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. 2 Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. 3 And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

John said that God has so loved love those that believe in Him that He calls them His children (v. 1). Nonbelievers do not understand believers because they cannot know God and didn't know His Son Jesus (v. 1d-ff). During our mortal lives as believers, we do not yet understand what we will become when we either get to heaven or meet Jesus when he returns to regather His church as we talked about in the first reading (v. 2). When we do finally meet Jesus our eyes will be opened, and we will

see Him for what He truly is without the veil of sin covering our minds. Finally, we have hope that God will bring these things about. While living with an eternal focus as true believers we strive to become more and more like Jesus by leaning upon God's power that He has placed within us. As we become more pure by maturing in our walk with Jesus, we become more like the true believers described by John in the reading. This provides an excellent lead-in to the Gospel lesson in which Jesus lists some of the qualities of people whose lives have been transformed by God.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading is from Saint Matthew in the section known as the Sermon on the Mount because of the location from which Jesus addressed the crowd in Galilee. The context is at the beginning of Jesus' ministry just after His temptation in the desert for forty days and the calling of the first disciples including Peter, Andrew, James and John. Jesus was beginning to draw large crowds and was telling the people to "repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17). This is the beginning of a much longer discourse that spans Matthew Chapters 5 through 7.

Gospel Reading:

Matthew 5:1-12 NAS95 1 When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him. 2 He opened His mouth and began to teach them, saying, 3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. 5 Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth. 6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. 7 Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. 8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. 9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. 10 Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

In this reading, Jesus announced a total of nine blessings, each opening with "Blessed are." Jesus is fulfilling the role of Prophet by providing a series of blessings, a word which means "happy." This contrasts with the usual words given by the Old Testament prophets who announced a series of curses and woes against those who refused to follow God. Jesus came to announce that the kingdom of heaven is at hand, and this is what the kingdom looks like. Therefore, it is important to recognize that the Sermon on the Mount is not a list of new things that people have to do in order to be right with God, but rather it is a list of defining qualities of people who have been transformed by God.

Jesus is redefining the blessed life. Think about how these traits contrast how the world defines blessing. Someone living the blessed life:

1. Is poor in spirit, meaning humble which leads a person to recognize their spiritual need for God.
2. Mourns, meaning they recognize that this world is not their home and looks to God for

comfort.
3. Exhibits gentleness, meaning they don't have to be aggressive to get things done because their heart is established in Christ's power.
4. Hungers and thirsts for righteousness meaning they prioritize eternal things over finite satisfaction in the world.
5. Shows mercy, because they were offered mercy themselves through the forgiveness given them by God and can extend it to others.
6. Is pure in heart, meaning they are not entangled with the evil ways of the world including lying, deceiving and manipulating people in order to get their own way.
7. Is a peacemaker, not just someone who tries to keep the peace at all costs. They actively seek peaceful solutions even in difficult situations which forces them to rely upon God more deeply.
8. Endures persecution with a vision toward eternity knowing that it is better to suffer than to succumb to temptation to compromise.
9. Endures insult because of their proclamation of truth (Word of God) just like happened to the prophets.

In summary, Jesus raised the bar of understanding to show the people that righteousness was not a bunch of behaviors that came by trying harder, but rather were qualities of the heart that were only possible through God's transforming power. These nine traits are the result of being born from above (John 3:3). Instead of being depressed that we can never be this good, Jesus delivered this sermon in order to invite us into a new way of life. This new way of life recognizes that our self-righteousness is as filthy rags before the LORD (Isaiah 64:6). We must come to the place where we receive Christ's righteousness into our hearts as a substitute for our former way of life (Romans 3:21-22).

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. How do you respond internally when you read the Sermon on the Mount? Does it feel like another list of impossible feats that you must accomplish in order to win God's favor? Or, have you responded to Jesus' invitation to life in the kingdom (where He is the King of your heart), and the Sermon on the Mount is a reflection of the work that He is doing in your life? If your response is more the former, that this is another list of impossible feats, you can turn to God in prayer and ask Him to give you His life from above and so be born anew.

2. In the first reading we read about how God appointed an angel to "seal" a group of Jews during the end times in order to protect them from the events that were going to unfold as described in the seven seals of Revelation. In what ways are you already "sealed" by God through your faith in Jesus Christ?

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/110115.cfm

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

I know someone that has been a Christian for a very long time while a certain uncle of hers was resistant to believing in Jesus Christ right up until near the end of his life. As he grew older, he steadfastly refused to bow his knee to Jesus Christ although almost everyone around him were followers of Jesus including his niece who told me the story, and her husband was a pastor. One night he went to bed expecting to awaken the next morning just like every other day. However, God had a different plan for him. As I was a new believer in Jesus Christ myself when I heard this story I remember how it profoundly impacted me as I listened with baited breath about what was going to happen next. The next morning when the man arose and looked at himself in the mirror, he found a depression in the bone of his forehead in the shape of a cross. He instantly recognized this as a miracle as a seal of God calling him to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ which he quickly obeyed. As others encountered him throughout the last years of his life, he testified of God's grace in marking him in this unique way such that he could no longer deny the one and only Savior Jesus Christ. This marking remained on his forehead for the rest of his life as a seal or marking of him as a follower of Jesus Christ. This week we will read about how God will in some future day "seal" a group of Jews in order to protect them from the wrath of the Antichrist who like many others before him will persecute God's chosen people.

Mass Study Notes for Sunday 3-2-2014

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Welcome back to Mass Notes for 3-2-2014. This week we continue with our studies from last week on Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. We will also look at a brief reading from Isaiah. In the Gospel message from the Sermon on the Mount, we will discuss the subject of worry. Has anyone in the Bible ever struggled with anxiety and what did God reveal about whether this was something that was acceptable in that person's life? Is it acceptable for a Christian to worry? We will address these things this week in Mass Notes.

For a helpful insight on the subject of worry, we can turn to the Old Testament Book of First Kings. Elijah was a mighty man of God in this dark era in Israel during the decline of the theocratic kingdom. This period followed the time of the Judges in which the Scripture said, "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25). There were bright spots in this age and one of them was the prophet Elijah. Elijah was perhaps best known for the incident recorded in First Kings 18 during a time of severe famine in Samaria. According to the Scripture Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal as to whether they could bring fire down on their sacrifice by calling on their god while Elijah would offer his sacrifice to God and ask Him to send fire to complete his burnt offering. The Priests of Baal failed miserably and began calling upon their god and cutting themselves in order to invoke a response. Next, Elijah was so certain the God would act upon his request that he soaked the wood with water (1 Kings 18:33). Here is how the story ended.

> *36 At the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, Elijah the prophet came near and said, "O LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, today let it be known that You are God in Israel and that I am Your servant and I have done all these things at Your word. 37 Answer me, O LORD, answer me, that this people may know that You, O LORD, are God, and that You*

> *have turned their heart back again." 38 Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. 39 When all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, "The LORD, He is God; the LORD, He is God." (1 Kings 18:36-39)*

Afterwards, Elijah had the Priests taken captive and then put them to death (v. 40). What an amazing victory Elijah had that day! After such an important victory one would think that Elijah would have continued his momentum and never suffered from any sort of worry. If God could light even wet wood on fire in front of the pagan priests Elijah could accomplish anything by calling upon the only true God in prayer. At least that is what one may think. But soon afterwards the Scripture records that Elijah fell into a period of deep anxiety because of the actions of a certain ungodly woman named Jezebel.

Jezebel was the evil wife of King Ahab, a king of Northern Israel. As a side note, I have always found it interesting that nobody I have ever come across has named his or her baby girl Jezebel. Some have branded their daughters with crazy names like Moon Unit (Zappa) or Alabama Gypsy Rose (Jennings), but not Jezebel. Anyway, immediately after Elijah's victory over the Prophets of Baal, wicked Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah saying, "So may the gods do to me and even more, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time (1 Kings 19:2b). His response was to flee for his life because of Jezebel's threat. "And he was afraid and arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree; and he requested for himself that he might die, and said, 'It is enough; now, O LORD, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers'" (vv. 3-4). Later, Elijah fled even further into the mountains to hide in a cave (1 Kings 19:9). How could such a mighty man of God, who had just witnessed God's dynamic power in the victory over the Prophets of Baal find himself holed up and worrying in a dark cave? If a mighty man of God like Elijah could suffer with anxiety, it's no wonder that Christians can also fall into patterns of worry.

We will see in the Gospel message some specific teaching from Jesus about worry. First, let's turn to the Old Testament reading in Isaiah Chapter 49. The context of the passage was God's promises for the future restoration of Israel. The chapter opens with the restatement of both the purposes of the Prophet Isaiah as well as Israel. God said about Isaiah that "He has made My mouth like a sharp sword, In the shadow of His hand He has concealed Me; And He has also made Me a select arrow, He has hidden Me in His quiver" (Isaiah 49:2). Isaiah was God's chosen instrument to bring the message of His judgment and promise of future restoration to Israel. Next God stated His purpose for the Nation. Isaiah said, "He said to Me, 'You are My Servant, Israel, In Whom I will show My glory'" (v. 3). Isaiah was chosen to be God's message to the Jews, and the Jews were chosen to bear God's message of salvation to the world. They were to be a "called out" people who were established by God as salt and light to the surrounding nations. Isaiah continued, "And now says the LORD, who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant, To bring Jacob back to Him, so that Israel might be gathered to Him (For I am honored in the sight of the LORD, And My God is My strength)" (v. 5).

In this week's Old Testament passage, the people reveal something very telling, which is common when we go through hard times. They ask if the LORD has forsaken them. Read God's answer.

> *14 But Zion said, "The LORD has forsaken me, And the Lord has forgotten me."*
>
> *15 "Can a woman forget her nursing child And have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, but I will not forget you. (Isaiah 49:14-15)*

God's answer was a resounding no, made even more clear by the clever use of the imagery of a woman and her nursing child. Of course it was impossible for a woman to forsake her nursing child. Therefore, it is impossible for God to forget His people.

As you think about the importance of this text for your own spiritual journey, consider the times that you have felt forsaken by God. What would it be like to hear God's answer to your feelings in such a resounding way? Well, as New Testament believers we have another clear verse that definitely says, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5). Our feelings do not always match the truth of the matter, just as Elijah's feelings didn't as he sat under the broom tree and wanted to die.

Saint John of the Cross coined the term the "Dark Night of the Soul" regarding times when one experienced the felt absence of the presence of God. If processed through, this God-ordained spiritual crises leads God's beloved on a journey that frees them from being dependent on their feelings and their own mixed motives in their relationship with God. This ultimately leads to a fuller relationship with God if we will let Him do this purifying work in us. What about you, have you ever experienced times in your life in which you felt forsaken by God, your own "Dark Night of the Soul?" Many people of God have experienced similar things. Mother Teresa of Calcutta reportedly experienced a decades long Dark Night of the Soul. We saw how the mighty Prophet Elijah experienced his own spiritual journey during his flight from Jezebel. It is common for God's people to have to walk by faith and not by sight. Is it possible that the moments of crises that we experience are opportunities to learn this new way of walking and living—which frees us up from the small horizons of this world?

Now let's return to our study of Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. In this section, which was a continuation of the idea that began in 3:18, Paul examined the judgmental spirit that was exhibited by some within the Corinthian Church. Specifically, some were proud in their self-righteousness and questioned Paul's authenticity as a spiritual leader. Instead of defending himself, Paul points to his relationship with God, who will ultimately be the final judge of our hearts.

> "Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you thinks that he is wise in this age, he must become foolish, so that he may become wise" (1Corinthians 3:18).
>
> *1 Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. 2 In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy. 3 But to me it is a very small thing that I may be examined by you, or by any human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself. 4 For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by*

> *this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord. 5 Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God. (1 Corinthians 4:1-5)*

Paul was being scrutinized by "super-apostles" that were deceiving the minds of the Corinthian believers. Instead of worrying, or turning to his own resources to defend himself, he turned to God. This is a proper response to the inadequacy that all of us feel in a world that is not our home. If we believe that Christ is our sufficiency, then we do not need to feel threatened by the universal human feeling of inadequacy.

The Gospel message is a continuation of our study last week of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Verse 25 contained an important prepositional phrase, "For this reason," translated "therefore" in many other versions. As we said last week, we need to ask ourselves what the word "therefore" is there for. In the context of the message today it becomes clear that Jesus has made a linkage between serving the god of money and the presence of anxiety in a person's life. With this thought in mind let's read the text for today.

> *24 "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth. 25* ***For this reason*** *I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? 27 And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life? 28 And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, 29 yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. 30 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith! 31 Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?' 32 For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. 34 So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." (Matthew 6:24-34, emphasis added)*

Jesus began with an analogy of the two masters, God, and money. By application, what Jesus said was that if you serve the god of money you worry. However, if you serve the one true God you don't have to worry because by seeking the kingdom of God first He will provide for your daily needs. Let's dig deeper into these verses.

There is a principle of Bible interpretation regarding the appearance of repeated words in the same section of a text. In this section of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, the word "worried" (Greek merimnao, "mare-im-nah-oh" or 'anxious' in some translations) is repeated no less than five times in

this short space. Jesus is saying emphatically don't worry (v.25), don't worry (v.27), don't worry (v.28), don't worry (v.31), don't worry (34). I wonder if Bob Marley's song, "Don't worry, be happy" got its inspiration from Jesus. But we all know, it's easier said than done.

How does a believer combat worry? The godly antidote to worry is prayer. Does it matter how we pray? Jesus gave us a model for prayer earlier in Matthew 6:9-13. This is the familiar Lord's prayer that you pray in Mass each week.

> *Pray, then, in this way: "Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen." (Matthew 6:9-13)*

In order for this to be an antidote to worry, we must enter into the reality of this prayer, not just recite it. The spiritual realities that Jesus invites us into experience include:

- We have a Father (that implies a relationship with someone bigger, wiser and more able to cope with this world than ourselves; we are not orphans).
- Our Father is in heaven (He is above the fray of this world and has power and resources at his command that we cannot even fathom).
- His name is holy (His name refers to his character and essence. If he is holy, then he relates in a way that is set apart from the world's way. You may want to review last week's discussion on holiness. His holiness is what creates a foundation of trust for us to surrender our will to His will, to turn to Him in our time of need.)
- He has a kingdom that is on the move. We can choose to be part of His kingdom and allow His way of heaven to infiltrate this world through my life. Instead of worrying about how I'm going to make it in this world, I am now focused on being used by God to bring His ways to bear on this world.
- He is our provider.
- He forgives us. And in His strength, we can extend forgiveness to others (again a quality of the Kingdom of God that is countercultural to the world's ways).
- He leads us out of temptation and delivers us from evil. Do I really want to be delivered from temptation and evil, or do I want only to be delivered from the negative consequences of sin?
- He has a kingdom, power and glory that will be manifested forever. Do I want to be a part of this, or do I think that doing life on my own is a better option?
- Concern for loved ones is a healthy form of expressing our bond to them in love.
- Because this world is not our home and has "thorns and thistles" due to the Fall (Gen. 3), we all have some degree of fear, inadequacy, and insecurity.
- Worry is a fallen human response to the normal human experiences of fear, inadequacy, and insecurity. Worry only calculates my resources and forgets about God's resources. We should all have a sense of healthy concern for loved ones, but to "worry" takes that concern to an unhealthy place that miscalculates God's heart and resources.

- When we feel worried (for ourselves or loved ones) God wants to use that as a prompt to turn to Him. 1 Peter 5:7 tells us to "Cast all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you." Phil. 4:6-7 also reinforces this direction to pray in the midst of our insecurities: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."
- Instead of feeling guilty over my worry, I can allow it to turn my heart to ask for God's help. What Satan intends for evil (my worry) ends up being used for good (my reminder to connect to my Heavenly Father in prayer). I grow in my faith and I end up pleasing the Lord (Heb. 11:6).
- Unfortunately, we do not always turn our anxiety into relational dependence on our Heavenly Father, as Scripture tells us to. Instead, we internalize it, carry it and feel as if it is our burden to carry, like we are martyrs suffering for a noble cause. Underneath the experience of this martyr complex, is a false formula that believes "If it's gonna be, it's up to me," which reveals an orphan complex. This is the flesh, trying to maintain some semblance of control, which reveals a lack of understanding of God's heart for His children and His abundant provisions. No wonder God wants us to turn away from worry and turn to Him.

These are some amazing realities that Jesus understood and allowed Him to live in a countercultural way, free of worry and anxiety, because He knew who His Father was. He offers that same type of perspective to us, if we will ask Him to teach us to pray in this way.

As we said in the introduction, if a mighty man of God like Elijah could suffer with anxiety, it's no wonder that Christians can also fall into patterns of worry. Yet, for some people worry can become something almost like a ministry in which it is hard to separate their legitimate concern for people from an overarching anxiety that could be classified as worry and therefore something that we are cautioned against in the Scripture. Such was the case with my grandmother. She was a faithful Roman Catholic woman who worshiped at Mass every Sunday and was the picture of love and humility. One day something happened which revealed how she viewed the concept of worry. My brother sensed (in his opinion) her overarching concern over some family member and told her that she shouldn't worry about it. In an uncharacteristic response she shouted, "You can't take that from me!" My grandma expressed herself through showing concern for her family. Was her "ministry of concern" something that was sinful or was it her legitimate, heart-felt care for them?

Over the years I have pondered my grandma's response to my brother's comment to her about not worrying. Here are a few thoughts that help me to understand God's heart for His children as it relates to worry.

So what became of Elijah after he endured his "dark night of the soul"? During his self-imposed exile Elijah mistakenly thought that he was the only believer left in the country. But God told him that there were 7,000 people left who had not worshiped the false god Baal (1 Kings 19:18). After he came out of hiding Elijah's first action was to follow God's call to appoint Elisha as his successor (v. 19). After this he received a word from God saying, "Of Jezebel also has the LORD spoken, saying,

'The dogs will eat Jezebel in the district of Jezreel'" (1Kings 21:23). Jezebel came to her end in this gruesome way and Elijah had the great honor of being one the two men in the Bible that have not yet had to die (though they will in the future, see Revelation 11:7-8) the first of whom was Enoch (Genesis 5:24, Hebrews 11:5). Elijah, one of the two witnesses of Revelation who will return to earth (Malachi 4:5-6, Revelation 11:3), went up to heaven this way. "As they were going along and talking, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire and horses of fire which separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind to heaven" (2 Kings 2:11). In the presence of God, there is no reason to worry. May we live in light of God's presence so that courage born out of deep trust marks our life day by day.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. The Isaiah passage revealed that God could not forget His people. How do you respond to this truth? What experiences have you had that seem to mock you for believing this truth? You can respond like the man who came to Jesus needing healing for his son. He said, "I belief, help my unbelief."

2. The New Testament passage showed how Saint Paul responded to unwarranted scrutiny and criticism. How do you respond to false accusations and criticism? How might Paul's example give you encouragement when others point out your inadequacies and failure to measure up to their expectations?

3. The Gospel passage reiterated to us the freedom that life in Jesus can bring from the gnawing experience of worry. As you go through the week ahead, try to be conscious of your patterns of worry and anxiety. Ask the Lord to turn your worry into relational dependence on Him, further knitting your heart to His.

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/030214.cfm

First Reading IS 49:14-15

Isaiah 49:14-15 NAS95 14 But Zion said, "The LORD has forsaken me, And the Lord has forgotten me." 15 "Can a woman forget her nursing child And have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, but I will not forget you.

Second Reading 1 COR 4:1-5

1 Corinthians 4:1-5 NAS95 1 Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the

mysteries of God. 2 In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy. 3 But to me it is a very small thing that I may be examined by you, or by any human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself. 4 For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord. 5 Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God.

Gospel Reading MT 6:24-34

Matthew 6:24-34 NAS95 24 "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth. 25 "For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? 26 "Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? 27 "And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life? 28 "And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, 29 yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. 30 "But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith! 31 "Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?' 32 "For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. 34 "So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

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 2-23-2014

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass Notes. This week we will be opening with a story about an encounter I had with two members from a certain religious group who were making the rounds one evening while I was visiting a friend. Then we will move onto the Book of Leviticus and learn something about God's calling for the Jews to be holy. Then we will continue our study in First Corinthians and finally conclude with further study from the Sermon on the Mount from Saint Matthew. There we will see a message that Jesus gave his disciples which culminated with a statement to them that they were to be perfect. How can anyone be perfect you may ask? We will address that and other things in the Mass Notes this week.

One night I was attending a dinner party at a friend's house in a nearby city. After dinner, we were sitting around talking and the doorbell rang. My friend left to answer the door and then suddenly called out, "Jim, it's for you!" Thoughts raced through my mind, who even knew that I was there, who could it be that wanted me while I was visiting someone else's house? I left the dining room and walked over to the front door only to be met by two young Mormon missionaries. These were of course not unique and matched the "cookie cutter" pattern with their nametags and backpacks. This was going to be an interesting night! After I introduced myself to the men, I prayed silently and asked God for the approach that I should take in order to introduce these boys to the *true* Gospel. As it turned out I had just completed a study of Mormon doctrine and it came to me that I should discuss the doctrine of perfection with them. I just so happened to have a Bible with me in my jacket and I asked them if they were familiar with Jesus' famous Sermon on the Mount. I don't remember their answer but I pulled out my Bible and asked them if they had time for a little Bible study because "You do believe in the Bible don't you?" Next, I asked them, "How good do you have to be to make it to heaven?"

They said something like, "We strive to be perfect." Nice boys they were.

I said that that was good because "Did you know that under the biblical Law Jesus taught that in order to be saved by being a good person you have to be perfect?" I opened up the Bible to Matthew Chapter 5 and read, "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). I asked them what was their standard of perfection, just how good did they have to be to make it to heaven, and how would they know when they had reached this standard? They weren't sure about that, but said that they just had to keep on trying. The debate continued and I was able to show them God's true plan of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ and not by good works. I explained to them how God emphasized the value of our good works, but that good works were not meritorious for salvation. I read to them Saint Paul's capstone statement on the matter:

> *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. 10 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)*

Paul's statement about the only way that people are saved (v.8a) is quite different from what is taught by the Mormon "church" that believes that they are saved by grace, but only *after all they can do*. This addendum is noticeably missing from the Word of God. Since salvation is a free gift from God that is obtained *only* through faith in the Lord Jesus we don't have to strive to be perfect in order to earn our salvation. Paul explained that the reason that God saved us was for the purpose of our good works. He didn't say that we were saved because of our good works. Although Christians are called to live holy lives through God's power a good Mormon is expected to triumph over sin in their own power, and this in order to earn their salvation. We can rejoice in the victory that God has given us over such a false belief system.

As we move onto the first reading, it's important for us to put our Old Testament hats back on and return to the culture of ancient Judaism. The first reading this week is from Leviticus Chapter 19. The Book of Leviticus is concerned with God's giving of the Law to Moses, and especially the ecclesiastical Law concerning sacrifices, offerings, and dietary Law. One of the overall purposes of the Law was to set the Hebrew people apart from the surrounding people. God said in the previous chapter, "Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'I am the LORD your God. You shall not do what is done in the land of Egypt where you lived, nor are you to do what is done in the land of Canaan where I am bringing you; you shall not walk in their statutes" (Leviticus 18:2-3). However, the most significant purpose of the Law was to point people to the perfect sacrifice that would occur through the Lamb of God (Jesus) who would take away the sins of the world (John 1:29). Let's pick up with the reading today in Chapter 19.

> *1 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 2 "Speak to all the congregation of the sons of Israel and say to them, 'You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy. 17 You shall not hate your fellow countryman in your heart; you may surely reprove your neighbor, but shall not incur sin because of him. 18 You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD.'"(Leviticus 19:1-2, 17-18)*

Several points arise from the reading. First, we see that God called the Hebrew Nation to be holy or set apart from sin and dedicated to the service of the LORD. Although we have all used and heard the word "holy" lots of times in our lives it's easy to gloss over the rich meaning of the word. In the reading God provided a simple reason why the Jews were to be holy when He said, "You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy" (v.2b). This was God's appeal to His nature and a calling for the Hebrew nation to emulate his character. As we said above, one reason that God provided the Law was to set apart the Nation of Israel from the surrounding people. The word holy means to be set apart and the Jews were called to be a peculiar people, different from the idolaters in the pagan cultures that surrounded them. They were to be holy because they were God's chosen people and were to reflect His image of holiness to the world around them. As we saw two weeks ago in our study of the Sermon on the Mount, the concept of being "set apart" was to fulfil special purposes for God, not to live an ordinary existence. The Jews were set apart for the purpose to be salt and light to those around them.

Second, God set a high standard of love for one's neighbor. This standard would have been foreign to the people from the nations surrounding Israel. The Jews, and by application all believers including us, were not to hate our neighbor in their mind (v.17a), but were instead called to love their neighbors as themselves (v.18c), and were not to take vengeance against them (v.18a). He didn't mean that we had to just love our literal neighbors, but everyone. God set this high standard of loving behavior in stone, in the Law of the land for the Hebrew people. Which of us hasn't hated our neighbor at one time or another?

Third, God said that the Jews were not to take vengeance against their neighbors. This wasn't directed to soldiers in battle because God provided clear direction to the Jews regarding those matters (see for example Deuteronomy 2:34, 3:6, and especially Deuteronomy 20:16-18). This was directed to all of God's people who were given these specific examples of how to live out one's life in a status as "set apart." Saint Paul confirmed that the admonition against taking retribution in Romans and quoted the exact verse from Leviticus. "'Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY,' says the Lord" (Romans 12:19). Although we may feel like we want to get even with someone for hurting us, God has given us a universal calling not to take action against a "neighbor" that has wronged us.

Back when I lived in a suburb in a large Midwestern city, I developed a strong dislike for the neighbor whose back yard adjoined the back of my own house. This particular neighbor, who I didn't even know, had a dog that he used to let outside to do his business. This dog would then bark endlessly until the neighbor let him back inside the house. This barking dog used to drive me absolutely crazy and as a result I developed a strong dislike of my neighbor. One day out of the blue, I came up with a novel approach to solve the problem. The next time he let the dog out to bark (I mean to let him do his business!) I walked over to the fence and called to the dog, "here boy." I kept calling and sure enough, the dog came running over to the fence, jumped up wanted to be petted. I made friends with the dog that day and as a result found that I no longer disliked my neighbor either! In fact, after I moved away I actually missed my doggy friend. Why did it take me so many years to figure that out? This was a case where love did truly conquer the conflict with my

neighbor. Now if I could just makes friends with my current neighbor's Akita!

How about you? Do you have some difficult people in your life to whom God is calling you to love, even though you don't have feelings of love for them? If you are His child, He will give you the ability to grow in loving even your enemies. Pray to God and ask Him to change your heart.

The second reading this week is a continuation of the study from last week in Saint Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. In this reading, Saint Paul explains the concept of personal holiness. As you read try to imagine the sense that a First Century Jew would have had when Paul mentioned the phrase "temple of God" and how that would flavor their reading of this text.

> *16 Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? 17 If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are. 18 Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you thinks that he is wise in this age, he must become foolish, so that he may become wise. 19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God. For it is written, "He is THE ONE WHO CATCHES THE WISE IN THEIR CRAFTINESS"; 20 and again, "THE LORD KNOWS THE REASONINGS of the wise, THAT THEY ARE USELESS." 21 So then let no one boast in men. For all things belong to you, 22 whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or things present or things to come; all things belong to you, 23 and you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God. (1 Corinthians 3:16-23)*

For a First Century Jew the temple in Jerusalem was the holiest and most sacred place on earth. We know from Jesus' ministry to the Jews that they had a difficult time understanding how the human body could be a temple (John 2:19). This was especially true not only because of the grandeur of the temple but also because the whole Jewish religious system revolved around the temple. But, when Jesus ushered in the church age he fulfilled the prophecy of Ezekiel. "And I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them. And I will take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh" (Ezekiel 11:19). Our bodies are a holy temple, or shrine. Later in the same Letter Paul said, "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?"(1 Corinthians 6:19). We are called to be holy because our bodies are a living temple of God.

In the next section, Paul prescribed humility for healing the divisions that existed in the Corinthian Church. What Paul is saying is that a person must be humble in order to learn. Paul quoted from Job Chapter 5 and Psalm 94 to make his point. Verse 10 that he quoted from Psalm 94 was sandwiched between two verses that dealt with chastening. "10 He who **chastens** the nations, will He not rebuke, Even He who teaches man knowledge? 11 The LORD knows the thoughts of man, That they are a mere breath. 12 Blessed is the man whom You **chasten**, O LORD, And whom You teach out of Your law" (Psalms 94:10-12). Chastening can be God's way to bring us to a humble position. One of Paul's intents was to bring the chastening of the Lord to bear on the sin of division in the Corinthian church.

If we really believe that our bodies house God's Spirit, that has far-reaching implications for how we treat and use our bodies, as well as how we treat others. As we move onto the Gospel lesson for today consider Paul's statement in the second reading about our bodies being a temple. Ponder this as you read the text from the Sermon on the Mount in Saint Matthew Chapter 5. "Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (1 Corinthians 3:16).

> *You have heard that it was said, 'AN EYE FOR AN EYE, AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH.' 39 But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. 40 If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. 41 Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two. 42 Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you. 43 You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy.' 44 But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. 46 For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47 If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? 48 Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matthew 5:38-48)*

The opening quotation was from Exodus 21:24. As an interesting side note, this quotation in Exodus followed the warning from God about neglecting to honor your parents. The Jewish Law said, "He who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death" (Exodus 21:17). Even though Jesus came to fulfill the Jewish Law, and under the New Covenant the civil and ceremonial Law are no longer binding upon Christians, the principles found in the *moral* Law are behaviors which are upheld in the New Testament. This includes honoring our parents (Ephesians 6:2), though the penalty for disobeying this law is no longer the death penalty. Notice the word "but," a transitory (conjunction) term. Jesus said in effect, "The Law prescribed this (you have heard it said), *but* I say do that." Jesus wasn't contradicting the Law but was instead calling His followers to obey a standard *higher* than the Law. We will see that this calling wasn't limited just to the Jewish Law, but to the laws of their entire society.

Jesus also called His followers to recognize a higher standard than their religious Law found in the Pentateuch (the first five Books of the Bible). His called extended to the Roman Civil law as well. This fact came out in verse 41 when Jesus spoke about being forced to go one mile. The First Century Jews were living under Roman occupation and as a result were under certain laws falling under the category of "impressment." Although they weren't under a requirement by the Romans to serve in a military function (conscription) they were required in certain circumstances to assist the Roman military. This could include being required to carry a Roman soldier's backpack 1,000 paces (a Roman mile). Jesus' outrageous call was to show the Roman soldiers generosity by going beyond the legal requirement. This principle of "going beyond the law" runs throughout the Gospel lesson for today.

Next, Jesus quoted from Leviticus 19, the text that we studied in the first reading. He said that you

should love your neighbor (v.43) but go beyond this and love your enemies and those who persecute you (v.44). Jesus' mention of "enemies and those who persecute you" could be an allusion to the Romans and the impressment laws. The Romans were the enemies of the Jews, which was a condition that came to a head with the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in AD 70, then again in AD 132.

Who are the "Romans" in your life? How might you go beyond obligation and actually go the extra mile?

The culmination of Jesus' radical call to go beyond the requirements of the law to perfection was found in verse 48. Take careful note of the adverb "therefore," and ask yourself "what is it there for?" This word is "there for" because it linked Jesus call to a radical new behavior to the source of the empowerment for His people to achieve it. Jesus said, "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). I asked the Mormon missionaries, how can anyone, even Jesus' own disciples be perfect? If we look further ahead in the Sermon on the Mount to Matthew Chapter 6, it seems apparent that by this point in Jesus' message the crowds had begun to rejoin Him and were hearing His message. This is evident because of the way the tone changed when He introduced practices that were typical of the Pharisees in 6:1-2. He said to "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them" (6:1a) and "So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets" (6:2a-b). Although Jesus' disciples may have had difficulties in controlling their personal behavior (as we do), they certainly didn't warrant Jesus' label of "hypocrites." No, Jesus reserved this label for His nemesis, the group known as the Pharisees. Now, with this context in mind let's read verse 48 in Chapter 5 again. How does Jesus love His "enemies" the Pharisees? Jesus said to the Pharisees and His disciples who were also listening, "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." The Pharisees were hypocrites and many evidently thought that they were already perfect through their strident observance of the Law (Matthew 23:5-7). The Scripture clearly states that nobody can be made perfect under the Law, "for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). What the Pharisees didn't understand was that perfection was only possible through faith in Jesus Christ. Saint Paul said, "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2Corinthians 5:21). Jesus provided the Holy Spirit to live within us as the source of our *spiritual* perfection. This spiritual perfection manifests itself in our radical obedience to God in going above the prescription of the eternal moral laws and the prevailing civil laws of our society. It's not that we won't ever sin but that our ongoing intention is to accomplish the work of God by being salt and light even to our enemies, the "Roman soldiers" in our community.

In summary, as Christians Scripture calls us to go beyond the law. Christians are called not only to observe the civil law (Romans 13:1-3) but to follow a standard above this body of law as well as a higher standard than the moral law that God has written on our hearts (Romans 2:15). God has provided us with His empowerment to follow this higher standard through the gift of the Holy Spirit Who is given to every believer who obeys (Acts 5:32).

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> *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. 10 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)*

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. In the Gospel lesson we said that as believers our spiritual perfection manifests itself in radical obedience to God in going above the prescription of the eternal moral laws and the prevailing civil laws of our society. Answer the following questions.

> A. Who are the "Roman soldiers" in your life? Is it your neighbor with their relentless barking dog? Has a city official ruled against you in a zoning dispute? Did a police officer nail you in a speed trap at the bottom of the hill in your village? Is your spouse eroding the feelings of love you once felt? Are you tired of changing an elderly person's diaper? Is your coworker stealing your joy in the workplace?
>
> B. How does knowing that God lives in your heart change the way that you view your enemies?

2. If holiness (being set apart) is God's vision for created human beings, then how might you cooperate more fully with God's plan?

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/022314.cfm

First Reading LV 19:1-2, 17-18 (Plus extra verses for Context)

Leviticus 19:1-18 NAS95 1 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 2 "Speak to all the congregation of the sons of Israel and say to them, 'You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy. 3 'Every one of you shall reverence his mother and his father, and you shall keep My sabbaths; I am the LORD your God. 4 'Do not turn to idols or make for yourselves molten gods; I am the LORD your God. 5 'Now when you offer a sacrifice of peace offerings to the LORD, you shall offer it so that you may be accepted. 6 'It shall be eaten the same day you offer it, and the next day; but what remains until the third day shall be burned with fire. 7 'So if it is eaten at all on the third day, it is an offense; it will not be accepted. 8 'Everyone who eats it will bear his iniquity, for he has profaned the holy thing of the LORD; and that person shall be cut off from his people. 9 'Now when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very corners of your field, nor shall you gather the

gleanings of your harvest. 10 'Nor shall you glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the needy and for the stranger. I am the LORD your God. 11 'You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another. 12 'You shall not swear falsely by My name, so as to profane the name of your God; I am the LORD. 13 'You shall not oppress your neighbor, nor rob him. The wages of a hired man are not to remain with you all night until morning. 14 'You shall not curse a deaf man, nor place a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall revere your God; I am the LORD. 15 'You shall do no injustice in judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor nor defer to the great, but you are to judge your neighbor fairly. 16 'You shall not go about as a slanderer among your people, and you are not to act against the life of your neighbor; I am the LORD. 17 'You shall not hate your fellow countryman in your heart; you may surely reprove your neighbor, but shall not incur sin because of him. 18 'You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD.

Second Reading 1 COR 3:16-23

1 Corinthians 3:16-23 NAS95 16 Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? 17 If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are. 18 Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you thinks that he is wise in this age, he must become foolish, so that he may become wise. 19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God. For it is written, "He is THE ONE WHO CATCHES THE WISE IN THEIR CRAFTINESS"; 20 and again, "THE LORD KNOWS THE REASONINGS of the wise, THAT THEY ARE USELESS." 21 So then let no one boast in men. For all things belong to you, 22 whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or things present or things to come; all things belong to you, 23 and you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God.

Gospel Reading MT 5:38-48

Matthew 5:38-48 NAS95 38 "You have heard that it was said, 'AN EYE FOR AN EYE, AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH.' 39 "But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. 40 "If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. 41 "Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two. 42 "Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you. 43 "You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy.' 44 "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. 46 "For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47 "If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? 48 "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

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Mass Study Notes for Sunday 2-16-2014



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass Study Notes. This week we continue our study of Saint Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians just past where we left of last week. Finally we will also continue with our study from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount from Saint Matthew's Gospel.

The first reading is from the Apocrypha and you can read that online at this link: http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/021614.cfm

In the second reading, St. Paul is contrasting the wisdom of this world with God's wisdom. The Greeks were concerned with human philosophies and persuasive words. The wisdom of God that Paul is referring to is His plan to bring fallen human beings back into right relationship with Himself through the sacrifice of His Son on the cross.

> *6 Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; 7 but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory; 8 the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory; 9 but just as it is written, "THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND WHICH HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN, ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM." 10 For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. (1 Corinthians 2:6-10)*

Here are some of the points that Paul uses to help us see the superiority of God's way that lies in sharp contrast to the world's way of doing things. God's wisdom . . .

- Is a mystery. No human philosophy or religious system has the deity paying for the debt of the offending party.
- Was hidden for many years. While it was hinted at in the Old Testament, it was finally revealed in the Person and work of Jesus Christ—specifically His redemptive role in taking our penalty for sin when He died on the cross, then living His life through our surrendered lives with His resurrection power (Eph. 1:18-23).
- Was predestined—God the Father sovereignly orchestrated the events that would reveal His wise plan of sending His Son to live and die in our place. Jesus' death was ordained by God the Father for our benefit ("our glory"). We will eventually share in God's glory because of Christ's willingness to pay our penalty.
- Is different than the world's ways. Those in power (rulers of this age) do not operate according to God's wisdom, which is based on love, sacrifice, relationship and trust. Instead, they operate according to the enemy's philosophy—which is based on deception, brute force and coercion. If the rulers had understood God's way, they would not have crucified Jesus.
- Goes beyond what any human could have devised or dreamed of. We have just touched the tip of the iceberg of all that a relationship with God entails. There's so much more to His love and provision than we are able to experience in this life.
- Is revealed through His Spirit. The Spirit opens our hearts to the depths of God, helping us to understand the goodness of God's ways.
- Honoring God by honoring the whole counsel of Scripture. His law will be written on our hearts (Jeremiah 31:33) and we will obey because God has given us a new heart (2 Cor. 5:17). As we have seen in past readings, the scribes and Pharisees tried to have an appearance of righteousness (outwardly), but were not fully surrendered to God. Their motives were still selfish and evil.
- Instead of the grace and love of God giving us a license to sin, it motivates us to follow His commands and teach others God's ways.
- Life in the Kingdom is characterized by :
    - Love, not disgust and disregard for human life (verses 21-22)
    - Being enthusiastic and proactive about peace-making (verses 23-26)
    - Treating the opposite sex as a treasure, not an object to be used for our selfish pleasure and thrown away when no longer useful (verses 27-32)
    - Having integrity and following through with one's commitments, even if it means personal sacrifice. Instead of looking for loopholes, we look for how to honor our word (verses 33-37).

As we think about God's wisdom, we may wonder what difference this makes in our daily lives. If God was wise enough to devise a plan for redemption through the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus, we can trust Him to be wise enough to work all things in our lives together for good in the lives of those who love Him (Rom. 8:28). When we don't understand God's ways, we can rest in the fact that He is wise, he knows what He is doing and He will accomplish something good. As one

preacher said, "It's Friday, but Sunday's coming!" So the fact that God could bring something good (our redemption) out of the death of His Son, gives us faith to walk in trust and on-going surrender to His ways.

The counterintuitive nature of God's wisdom shows up in the Gospel passage as Jesus is teaching on the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus' premise is that those who are his disciples will be characterized by a different value system than those who live apart from God. Because Christians are now aware that we live in a God-saturated world, our lives will reflect heaven's realities. We must be careful not to reduce this perspective to a list of rules to follow. Instead, we need to see this as a new way of life that is characterized by these things that are impossible to do outside of a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Before we return to our study from last week of the Sermon on the Mount I would like to share a story about how circumstances can drive critical choices in the life of believer who has been given a new heart from God (Romans 18:8-9). I was employed by (and am) one of the owners of a computer software and consulting company. One of my coworkers was responsible for sales and during the course of his employment we had made a friendly relationship with each other. One afternoon a day or two after he had returned from a tiring business trip I called him at his home office to discuss how we were going to follow up on the clients with whom we had met. During this call, he seemed tired and even paused a few times between his words. I thought that this was unusual but brushed it off by thinking he was probably still tired from the trip. Two days later I received an urgent call from his girlfriend that he had had a heart attack and was in the hospital in a coma. Because he was in the intensive care unit, I wasn't allowed to visit him right away. After a few days I made the three and half hour journey to the hospital and was able to visit him and his family and say my goodbyes. He never regained consciousness and passed away the following morning. After our CFO found out about his passing we discussed the insurance provisions that he had in place as well as the fact that he was due some a substantial sales commission check as well as reimbursement for his expenses from the previous trip. Although nobody ever know if we didn't send it, she insisted upon sending his sales commission check to his estate. She said that it was from her Christian perspective the right thing to do. Although this man had considerable investments, and the checks our company sent were small in comparison, our company officer was compelled by her sense of responsibility in the Kingdom of God to settle the amounts. As the years have passed I have wondered how many employers would have taken advantage of this situation and simply "forgot" to send the funds that were due. Such is the nature of the "other worldly," supernatural motivation that God provides to His obedient believers.

Now we will move onto the Gospel lesson from the section of Saint Matthew's Gospel known as the Sermon on the Mount. It is helpful to keep in mind that Matthew was what I would call "the most Jewish" of the writer of the Gospels. Matthew wrote with a uniquely Jewish perspective with his overall purpose being to show that Jesus was Israel's promised Messiah. Matthew assumed that his audience was well grounded in the Jewish culture and belief system. The Jews were well grounded in the belief that the Kingdom of Heaven was to be "other-worldly" and supernatural. Now let's read the text while we imagine a yarmulke on our heads.

> *17 Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. 18 For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. 19 Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. 21 You have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' 22 But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell. 23 Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering. 25 Make friends quickly with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way, so that your opponent may not hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. 26 Truly I say to you, you will not come out of there until you have paid up the last cent. 27 You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY'; 28 but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 29 If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. 30 If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell. 31 It was said, 'WHOEVER SENDS HIS WIFE AWAY, LET HIM GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE'; 32 but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery. 33 Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT MAKE FALSE VOWS, BUT SHALL FULFILL YOUR VOWS TO THE LORD.' 34 But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, 35 or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is THE CITY OF THE GREAT KING. 36 Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. 37 But let your statement be, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'; anything beyond these is of evil. (Matthew 5:17-37)*

As you can see, this new way of life is "other-worldly" and "supernatural." This is not how the world operates, so it must come from above (John 3:3). As we encounter God's grace as shown in Christ's sacrifice, we are transformed into people who love Him and obey from the heart. Kingdom living is predicated upon surrendering the old way of life to Jesus in order to be tutored in a new way of life that is God-infused. This passage highlights what life in Jesus' Kingdom (when Jesus rules in our hearts) should look like.

Life in the Kingdom of God, where Jesus rules and reigns in our hearts is very different from the dog-eat-dog world we live in. God is going to have to restructure our interpretive framework for life in

order to transform us from low levels of living to His higher levels of living. This is not something that we can manufacture, but it is a noble calling to which each person has to decide to respond.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. Spend some time taking an inventory of your life by reflecting on the contrast between the world's wisdom and God's wisdom (as seen in the New Testament reading and the Gospel reading). Which way of thinking most characterizes your life? Which way of thinking would you like to most characterize your life?

2. The above list of Kingdom values characterizes people who are living a God-saturated life. How do you see these traits being lived out in your life? What traits would you like to see be developed as you continue to grow in your relationship with God?

Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass visit this web site: http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/021614.cfm

First Reading SIR 15:15-20

See http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/021614.cfm

Second Reading 1 COR 2:6-10

1 Corinthians 2:6-10 NAS95 6 Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; 7 but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory; 8 the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory; 9 but just as it is written, "THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND WHICH HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN, ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM." 10 For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God.

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass Study Notes. This week we will begin with the Gospel reading where we will study a portion of Jesus' famous "Sermon on the Mount." Jesus' teaching in that portion of Saint Matthew's Gospel has led many people, including me, to leave the Sunday Mass with a tremendous feeling of guilt because we sense that were are not doing enough for God. Scripture provides clear guidance on the right response to this teaching and we will address that in the study today. Then we will move onto the first reading from the Old Testament and then conclude with a continuation of our study in Saint Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians.

The Gospel lesson is from Matthew Chapter 5, which is a portion of the Sermon on the Mount that includes Chapters 5 through 7. It is important to understand the context of Jesus' message to His disciples. Jesus' sermon was given on a mountain somewhere in Galilee (v.1). Most commentators believer that it was on hill near the west edge of Capernaum which would have provided a commanding view of the Sea of Galilee. Since this wasn't an area that was productive for growing crops it would have allowed large numbers of people to sit and listen to Jesus' teaching without doing damage to the area. Jesus gave at least the first portion of the address directly to the disciples away from the crowds. In verse 1 Saint Matthew said that Jesus went up to the mountain with His disciples, then "he opened his mouth and taught 'them.'" (v.2, emphasis added). This was, then at least during the beginning portion of the message, a private discipleship training session by Jesus to his handpicked team. However, at the end of the Sermon the crowds seem to have rejoined Him because in 7:28 "the crowds were amazed at His teaching." In summary, at the beginning Jesus addressed His disciples with the crowds in view, but in the later section addressed the crowds with the disciples in view.

The message today was just after the portion of the Sermon on the Mount known as the "Beatitudes." The Beatitudes are pronouncements of blessings for those waiting for the promises of the Messiah, and curses for those who were trying to obtain God's blessing through their own effort. They begin with Chapter 5 verse 3, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." They continue, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted" (v.4). This pattern continues with blessings for the gentle (v.5), those who hunger and thirst for righteousness (v.6), the merciful (v.7), the pure in heart (v.8), the peacemakers (v.9), and finally the persecuted (vv.10-11). These blessings aren't as much about representing the hallmarks of a true Christian but rather are the blessings that follow when a person submits themselves to God and receives the gifts of His empowerment through the Holy Spirit in community with other believers. Instead of the motto, "If it's going to be it's up to me" the Spirit indwelled believer says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3) and "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted" (v.4). The nature of the blessed person is the essence of life in the "kingdom of heaven" (John 3:3). It's with this God-directed empowerment that we must approach the interpretation of the verses about salt and light being covered in the message today.

As you read the message, think about the importance of salt and light to the people of the first century era.

> *13 "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. 14 You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; 15 nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. 16 Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 5:13-16)*

Salt and light were essential elements for survival in a society where the modern conveniences of electricity and refrigeration hadn't yet been invented. Light was essential for survival, both for seeing at night as well as for cooking and food preservation. Just as I struggled to find fuel in the dark when my truck ran out of gas, the First Century people were dependent upon their own source of fuel. Salt and light were essential staples of First Century life. However, what does Jesus mean by asking the rhetorical question about hiding the light and salt losing its saltiness?

Our Christian lives as salt and light are important to the world. Regardless of our career or status in life, our Holy Spirit empowered lives are important to seasoning and lighting our relationships with people in the world. In the same way that Jesus first directed His message in the Sermon on the Mount to His disciples, our place of training and fellowship is in the Church. However, we are not to remain inside the Church to the point of becoming a part of "churchianity." Instead, in the same way that the crowds in the Sermon on the Mount were curious of Jesus' teaching we too must go out and teach the world. We will not only carry the light of the Gospel to the lost but we ***are*** the light to the lost world. The crucial difference between someone that has lost their saltiness and covered their light and one that spreads salt and light is that the latter has accepted the free gift of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ Who then empowers this person to accomplish those goals. This Holy

Spirit directed life is the hallmark of a true believer. The ultimate goal of every believer should be sharing your faith with others, in words and deeds. "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (v.16).

I would like to share an illustration with you to help you understand the importance of leaning upon God and others for the empowerment to serve God. I remember back sometime around the late 1980's when my friend and I decided to pack up our snowmobiles and drive from southwestern Michigan to the great white north country of northern Michigan for a one-day trip to ride our snowmobiles. Because we didn't have any means of carrying two machines we both loaded our snowmobiles into our separate trucks and headed north. In my case I had borrowed my dad's Ford F150 which although was a decent running vehicle it consumed large amounts of gas. It had a second minor issue; the gas gauge wasn't accurate below about one quarter of tank. We had an excellent day of riding on the trails around Kalkaska and Bellaire, Michigan. At the end of the day, we even stopped for refreshments at the Schuss Mountain Ski resort. All that was left was to make the two and a half hour trip back to my parent's home back south. This was shaping up to be an easy and relaxing end to a very fulfilling day of riding. As we made our way south in the dark night, I was uncomfortable with the speed at which my friend was driving so just north of Grand Rapids I lagged behind him a bit. Right after that the truck began losing power so I blinked my headlights furiously to attract the attention of my friend who by now about a quarter of a mile ahead of me. He evidently didn't see me and the truck ground to a halt as I pulled onto the shoulder of the highway. I knew what had happened; I had run the truck out of gas!

Here's a bit of background about me to help you understand my though process that evening. I was raised on a farm and was a member of the clan of engineers known as "MacGyvers," the name of the television character who could construct something out of almost nothing. If you gave me some bits of wire and a few hand tools, I have been known to fix almost anything. My motto was something like, "if it's going to be it's up to me."

Back to what happened that night. I considered my options and came up with a plan to drain some fuel from the snowmobile into a soda pop can. Since the truck had a cap on the bed, I had a difficult to impossible time trying to tip the machine over far enough to drain out any fuel. Moving onto Plan B I tried to remove a line from the primer bulb in order to pump some fuel into the can and could not get that to work either. When this failed, I moved to Plan C. Since I had very few tools with me I attempted to remove the fuel tank from the snowmobile in order to pour the gas into the fuel tank in the truck. I couldn't get the tank off without the necessary tools. The cars continued to zoom past me on the highway. I was furious at my friend for leaving me in this mess! Since I was near civilization, I started walking. I had to cross a small creek, navigate dense underbrush and finally cross a very tall barbed wire fence that led me to the parking lot of a movie theatre. I finally got to the point that I had to ask someone for help. The thought cross my mind to pray so I asked God to help me. . I don't know why it was so hard for me to turn to someone else for help, but I guess I hoped that I could just get myself out of this situation! Next I flagged down a security guard who as it turned out had seen me scale the barbed wire fence. He kindly drove me across the street to a gas station where I was able to borrow a gas can and buy some fuel. This kind man then drove me back

to a better location from which I could walk back to my vehicle, although I had to cross the creek again – at night, in the middle of winter, through briars, and without a flashlight. Over the years, I never forgot about that evening!

What did I learn from all of the events that night? One of the areas in which I struggled spiritually was whether I was doing enough for God. I didn't feel that I was salt and light to my nonbelieving friends and those with whom I came in contact. In addition, I remembered the decades of my life hearing the Gospel readings in Mass, which left me feeling guilty about how much I was accomplishing for God. I served as an altar boy until I was sixteen, but didn't find fulfillment through it. Once I visited a rest home with our Catechism class and promised myself I would go back, but never did. Years later, after I began studying the Bible on my own, I began to understand that I had to come to the end of my own means and turn to others for help, both in practical and spiritual matters. I reached a major turning point with this revelation. I couldn't MacGyver my way through the Christian life, but instead needed to humbly turn to God for help. God doesn't expect us to accomplish great things for Him without providing us with the means of empowerment. The Holy Spirit is our spiritual fuel. If we have truly repented of our sins and trusted only in the finished work of Jesus Christ, He has empowered us through the gift of the Holy Spirit, and also by our relationships with other believers. As you think through the Sermon on the Mount, ask yourself if you have come to the end of yourself and turned to the one and only Source, Jesus Christ. Do you feel guilty that you aren't accomplishing enough for God? As always, we will continue each week in the Mass Notes to reveal what it means to be a true follower of Jesus Christ.

Now we will move onto the first reading that is from Isaiah Chapter 58. Since you have already studied an example of what a God-directed life looks like in the Sermon on the Mount you will likely understand Isaiah's text quite differently. As you read, praise God for how He has empowered His children as salt and light in our generation through their generous Holy Spirit directed actions. Second, contrast the behavior of the former person with someone like King Saul who was motivated by self-centered thinking (1 Samuel 13).

> *6 "Is this not the fast which I choose, To loosen the bonds of wickedness, To undo the bands of the yoke, And to let the oppressed go free And break every yoke? 7 Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry And bring the homeless poor into the house; When you see the naked, to cover him; And not to hide yourself from your own flesh? 8 Then your light will break out like the dawn, And your recovery will speedily spring forth; And your righteousness will go before you; The glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. 9 Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; You will cry, and He will say, 'Here I am.' If you remove the yoke from your midst, The pointing of the finger and speaking wickedness, 10 And if you give yourself to the hungry And satisfy the desire of the afflicted, Then your light will rise in darkness And your gloom will become like midday. (Isaiah 58:7-10)*

Notice the amazing similarity with the Sermon on the Mount. The Holy Spirit-directed believer "divides bread with the hungry" (v.7a), houses the homeless (v.7b), and provides clothing to those without it (v.7c). As a result, these believers shine light like the dawn (v.8), and God hears and

answers their prayers (v.9). They respond in physical ways by filling the needs of those less fortunate but more importantly, they are spiritual salt and light to a lost, sin-stained, dying world. Isaiah's message was given to a generation of people who had neglected what Saint James in the New Testament called "basic religion." "Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world" (James 1:27). His message is equally relevant to the people in our generation.

What does the Sermon on the Mount and Isaiah's message mean for us today? First, God provides blessings to those who are in spiritual communion with Him. This communion comes only through a personal relationship and saving faith in Jesus Christ. Second, God provides us with the means of empowerment to live the Christian life to be salt and light to a dying world. Jesus said "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever" (John 14:16). He has given us this Comforter Who is God living inside of us (John 14:17c). What should you do if you feel that you aren't doing enough for God? Ask Jesus to be your sufficiency and allow God to change your heart from being motivated by guilt to being motivated by grace.

Recently my wife and I had dinner with our neighbors and their three daughters. During dinner, we found out that one of the young ladies had recently taken a special interest in a certain young man at her church. She explained that this was a recent development because prior to this time she had considered him awkward and she didn't want to have any sort of romantic relationship with him. Then one day she told us that she decided to pray about that matter and she got an idea about how to proceed. She felt the need to pray that if this relationship was something that was from God, she asked God to change her heart towards him, and if not that God should change his heart away from her. So she prayed this prayer and God did indeed change her heart. The message is that if you don't feel you are doing enough for God you should ask God to change your heart.

Now we will move onto the second reading. Last week we completed our study in First Corinthians Chapter 1 and this week we will move onto Chapter 2. As you read, remember what Paul discussed in Chapter 1 about how the Corinthian Church was being torn by sexual immorality and division.

> *1 And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. 2 For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. 3 I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, 4 and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God. (1 Corinthians 2:1-5)*

Paul claimed God's authority for his message (v.1c), saying that his message was directly from God. Next he explained how he humbly proclaimed this message from God "in fear and in much trembling" (v.3a); not through the use of the Grecian persuasive techniques of the day but rather through a "demonstration of the Spirit and power" (v.4). The reason he did that, said Paul, was so that the Corinthians' faith would be based upon the Word of God and not on Paul's rhetorical argument (v.5).

What does Paul's message mean for us today? First, we may not have the ability to provide an eloquent argument for our faith but that doesn't mean that we should remain silent. Saint Peter said, "but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence" (1Pe 3:15). This is one way in which we bring salt and light to a world that is dying without the knowledge of Jesus Christ. Second, we are to rely on the Word of God, not our own persuasive strategies as we share our faith with others. The Word is God is powerful and will provide us with a tremendous resource to use as a witnessing tool once we have hidden it in our heart (i.e. memorized key verses). "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" (Hebrews 4:12). Third, it is okay to not have all the answers, since our lack will be an opportunity for others to see how Jesus compensates for our weakness (2 Cor. 12:9-10).

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. There is a basic misunderstanding of the role of guilt in most of our lives. Guilt often leads us to a think: "I'll work on that and get better." Instead, guilt is supposed to lead us to think: "I need You, Lord." Think about a time that you felt guilty about not doing enough for God. What was the circumstance that brought this about? In light of what you learned from the Sermon on the Mount, what would be a better way of responding to this feeling?

2. Henri Nouwen said in Wil Hernandez's book "A Spirituality of Imperfection" (Paulist Press, 2006), "God has deliberately chosen to break through human history in the person of Christ manifesting total weakness in birth and dying on the cross in voluntary powerlessness" (p. 79). How does Christ's example of humility and weakness help you to act as salt and light to those people whom God has placed in your life? Consider this in light of what you learned from the reading in First Corinthians.

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/020914.cfm

First Reading IS 58:7-10

Isaiah 58:7-10 NAS95 7 "Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry And bring the homeless poor into the house; When you see the naked, to cover him; And not to hide yourself from your own flesh? 8 "Then your light will break out like the dawn, And your recovery will speedily spring forth; And your righteousness will go before you; The glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. 9 "Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; You will cry, and He will say, 'Here I am.' If you remove the yoke from your midst, The pointing of the finger

and speaking wickedness, 10 And if you give yourself to the hungry And satisfy the desire of the afflicted, Then your light will rise in darkness And your gloom will become like midday.

Second Reading 1 COR 2:1-5

1 Corinthians 2:1-5 NAS95 1 And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. 2 For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. 3 I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, 4 and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.

Gospel Reading MT 5:13-16

Matthew 5:13-16 NAS95 13 "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. 14 "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; 15 "nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. 16 "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB