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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 109: 07/26/2026



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week, we open with the Old Testament reading that describes King Solomon's prayer for wisdom. Our New Testament reading describes God's vision for each follower to be conformed to the image of His Son, Jesus. This is truly wise living. In the Gospel lesson, we continue with more about Jesus' teaching in parables from last week. He provides short stories about wise people who valued the Kingdom of Heaven above all else and inherited eternal life.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The story is set after the death of King David. Israel was in its "golden era," having subdued its enemies and established itself as a nation. Solomon was David's son by Bathsheba and succeeded David on the throne. We catch a glimpse of his heart as he begins his reign over Israel.

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First Reading:

> *5 In Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream at night; and God said, "Ask what you wish me to give you." 6 Then Solomon said, "You have shown great lovingkindness to Your servant David my father, according as he walked before You in truth and righteousness and uprightness of heart toward You; and You have reserved for him this great lovingkindness, that You have given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day. 7 Now, O LORD my God, You have made Your servant king in place of my father David, yet I am but a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. 8 Your servant is in the midst of Your people which You have chosen, a great people who are too many to be numbered or counted. 9 So give Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people to discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?" 10 It was pleasing in the sight of the Lord that Solomon had asked this thing. 11 God said to him, "Because you have asked this thing and have not asked for yourself long life, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have you asked for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself discernment to understand justice, 12 behold, I have done according to your words. Behold, I have given you a wise and discerning heart, so that there has been no one like you before you, nor shall one like you arise after you. (1 Kings 3:5-12)*

These verses show us the beginning steps of King Solomon. Some important observations include:

- God came to Solomon in a dream
- God invited Solomon to ask Him for whatever he wished
- Solomon recognized God's great loving-kindness (fiercely loyal love) before answering
- Solomon also recognized his finiteness and sense of inadequacy for the important role that he was being placed in
- Solomon asked for an understanding heart to judge the people of Israel and to discern

between good and evil

- God granted this request and blessed him with wisdom

If you know the rest of the story, you may be confused about how a person could be granted a wise and discerning heart and yet end up being led astray by all of the women (700 of them) he was married to (1 Kings 11:3). I wonder if his great wisdom came through the school of hard knocks. For at the end of his life, he confesses: "The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person" (Ecclesiastes 12:13). No matter how much wealth, power, and status, the wisest man on earth concludes that fearing God is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10).

You may not be a king, but we can all come to God and ask Him for wisdom. James 1:5 says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him." We all have roles in life that are challenging. We can follow Solomon's lead and recognize God's fiercely loyal love and our inadequacy. This should lead us, with humility and desperation, before the true King of kings, as we ask our Heavenly Father for what we truly need: wisdom.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from the New Testament, Saint Paul's letter to the Romans, which is a continuation of what we read last week. Paul is in the middle of declaring the victory that believers have through Christ. But the victory comes through the back door of recognizing our human weakness. This echoes King Solomon's prayer for wisdom in the earlier reading. For it is in our weakness that we find help from the Holy Spirit, who is interceding for us according to the will of God the Father (Romans 8:27).

Second Reading:

> *28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. 29 For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; 30 and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified. (Romans 8:28-30)*

In its context, this passage casts an inspiring and hopeful vision for followers of Christ. For it declares that God uses all things for His good purposes. While not all things that happen in this life are good, God is able to use every circumstance (pleasurable and painful) to accomplish His predestined will: to conform us to the image of His Son. He wants us to look like Christ. That's what this life is all about. That is God's vision for us as His followers. The question for us is, how badly do we want His vision for our lives? Are we willing to let God conform us to the image of His Son and work all things together for good, or do we want to just "get enough of God" in order to go to heaven when we die? There is a foundational condition of having all things work together for good: this comes to one who loves God and allows Him to work out His good purposes in his or her life. What this implies is trust and surrender to God's bigger purposes. He knows what is best for us. Someday, we will agree wholeheartedly with Him.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

In the Gospel lesson this week we continue with Jesus' teaching to His disciples through parables that we looked at the past two weeks.

Gospel Reading:

> *44 "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. 45 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, 46 and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it. 47 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet cast into the sea, and gathering fish of every kind; 48 and when it was filled, they drew it up on the beach; and they sat down and gathered the good fish into containers, but the bad they threw away. 49 So it will be at the end of the age; the angels will come forth and take out the wicked from among the righteous, 50 and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 51 Have you understood all these things?" They said to Him, "Yes." 52 And Jesus said to them, "Therefore every scribe*

> *who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a head of a household, who brings out of his treasure things new and old." (Matthew 13:44-52)*

Jesus is away from the crowds (Matthew 13:36) and now teaches His disciples in parables, something He had previously done only when the crowds were present. The main subject is the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus paints a few broad strokes to entice His followers to continue their costly pursuit of becoming disciples of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Jesus likens the Kingdom of Heaven to a hidden treasure and a pearl of great price. In the parable of the hidden treasure, the man isn't searching for it; in contrast, the man in the parable of the pearl is on an active search to locate valuable pearls. Both parables, though, require a sacrifice on the part of the would-be owners of the precious goods. But the sacrifice is insignificant for the joy of obtaining the truly valuable treasure. Jesus is helping us see that the Kingdom of Heaven is worth every seeming sacrifice made to walk with Him in this world. Jesus' kingdom is only partially here, and these parables illustrate the great value of this down payment on the full kingdom, the mystery of life eternal.

The apostle Paul understood clearly the surpassing value of a discipleship relationship to Jesus: "I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things" (Phil. 3:8).

The last illustration of the Kingdom of Heaven is very striking. It is that of a dragnet that is tossed out to catch fish. At the end of the age, the fish will be sorted out. The good will go into containers, and the bad will be thrown out. Jesus gives the explanation clearly. The wicked will be sorted out from the righteous and will be thrown into the furnace of fire (referring to a literal Hell). The prospects of an eternity with weeping and gnashing of teeth are almost too much to fathom. But Jesus, in His kindness, gives us insight into eternity. In this life, we have many choices to make, but the most important is where we will spend eternity. Based on our sin, we have only one label that we can claim: wicked. "There is none righteous, not even one" (Romans 3:10). We cannot claim the label "righteous," no matter how good we try to be. But Jesus came to give us the label and identity of "righteous" by bearing the punishment for our wickedness on the cross and giving us His righteousness. "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). So, while we don't deserve the label of righteous, we can choose to have it if we will receive God's gift of eternal life. It's a gift, though. It doesn't count until you receive it. Have you placed your faith in God's gift of eternal life through Christ? Are you counting on this for your salvation?

If so, you are a disciple of the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus said that each one who follows Him into His Kingdom brings out new and old treasures. This means that we have a growing testimony of God's valuable work in our lives. We can speak of the current work that He is doing and the past work that He has done. We are cooperating with His vision to conform us into the image of His Son, for we know that the Son is our most valuable treasure indeed.

Reflection Questions

1. What does it really mean to be a disciple of the "Kingdom of Heaven?" What are one or two ways in which this played out in your life this week?

2. What "sacrifices" have you made to be a disciple of the Kingdom of Heaven? How do these parables help you to know that it is worth it?

3. How does the story of Solomon asking for wisdom illustrate the parable of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl of Great Price? In what areas do you want God to help you become wise and discerning about your own life and pursuits? Spend some time in prayer, asking Him for His perspective and wisdom for your life. Let Him know that you want to surrender to His vision for conforming you to the image of His Son.

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 111: 07-27-2025

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week, we cover three excellent readings, in which we learn more about God's righteous nature, the forgiveness we have through Jesus Christ, and how Jesus teaches us to pray.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading from Genesis picks up where we left off in last week's reading, where we saw Abraham meet with two angels and the Lord Jesus Himself. This week's reading deals with Abraham's pleading with God concerning the people of the region of Sodom and Gomorrah. These cities were located just north of the Dead Sea in an area known for its great fertility. Today's reading chronicles the events leading up to the destruction of the cities, turning them into the wasteland that they are today.

First Reading:

> *Genesis 18:20-32 NAS95 20 And the LORD said, "The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah is indeed great, and their sin is exceedingly grave. 21 I will go down now, and see if they have done entirely according to its outcry, which has come to Me; and if not, I will know." 22 Then the men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, while Abraham was still standing before the LORD. 23 Abraham came near and said, "Will You indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? 24 Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; will You indeed sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous who are in it? 25 Far be it from You to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous and the wicked are treated alike. Far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?" 26 So the LORD said, "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare the whole place on their account." 27 And Abraham replied, "Now behold, I have ventured to speak to the Lord, although I am but dust and ashes. 28 Suppose the fifty righteous are lacking five, will You destroy the whole city because of five?" And He said, "I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there." 29 He spoke to Him yet again and said, "Suppose forty are found there?" And He said, "I will not do it on account of the forty." 30 Then he said, "Oh may the Lord not be angry, and I shall speak; suppose thirty are found there?" And He said, "I will not do it if I find thirty there." 31 And he said, "Now behold, I have ventured to speak to the Lord; suppose twenty are found there?" And He said, "I will not destroy it on account of the twenty." 32 Then he said, "Oh may the Lord not be angry, and I shall speak only this once; suppose ten are found there?" And He said, "I will not destroy it on account of the ten."*

The LORD told Abraham about the terrible sin of the people of the region of Sodom and Gomorrah (v. 20). The text says that the LORD would go "down" to Sodom (v. 20). This word brings with it two meanings, geographically south and downwards spiritually. Looking back to chapter 13, we see how Abraham's nephew Lot chose to live in this fertile region when the land would not support both of their herds, and there was a conflict among their herdsmen (Genesis 13:7). Abraham, a man who was well acquainted with God and knew of His grace and forgiveness, pleaded with the Lord Jesus before He went down to the region to judge them. We are not told how Abraham knew that the LORD's visit meant judgment. Regardless, Abraham began pleading on the basis of whether there were fifty righteous people in the cities and whether the LORD would not destroy the people. Jesus' answer was implied as negative; there were not fifty righteous people in the region. After Abraham received this negative implication, he boldly decreased the number to 40, then 30, 20, 10, and finally just 5. By implication, by not responding to Abraham's final question, the region of Sodom and Gomorrah did not contain even five righteous people. What a terrible condition the region had come to without having even five righteous people in the region!

We may ask, how many righteous people were there in these cities? We know there was at least one righteous person in the land, the person of Lot, or at least he came to be righteous later in life after the destruction of the region of Sodom and Gomorrah, where he lived. Even if Lot was righteous in the eyes of the Lord, this would not have brought the total number to the value of five, as predicted

by Abraham's question. We know that the LORD did not destroy Lot. Rather, He sent the two angels with whom Abraham had met, and they eventually led him away from the city before the fire rained down (Genesis 19:24-25). Looking a bit deeper at Lot, although he may or may not have been a righteous man at the time of the story in Genesis 18, we know that sometime later, he repented and was added to the hall of faith in the New Testament. We also know that God spared the city of Zoar from destruction because of Lot's request (Genesis 19:20-21).

The rest of Lot's family didn't fare so well. We know that Lot's wife didn't make the grade (Genesis 19:26). The relationship between Lot's daughters and God is murky since we know that they later engaged in immoral sexual relations with their father since they felt that after the destruction of Sodom every man was dead and that they had to save the race from extinction (Genesis 19:19:31). This severe faithlessness may be abrogated a bit in light of the fact that they had just witnessed the terrible extermination of everyone in the region in which they lived by fire and brimstone raining from the sky (Genesis 19:24). This brings to mine the story of Elijah when he thought that he was the last believer alive in the entire world (1 Kings 19:14). Then the LORD reminded this great prophet during his brief season of faithlessness that there remained 7,000 who had or would be true to Him (1 Kings 19:18). So although Lot's daughters may have doubted God's promises made through Abraham, we are not told the ultimate condition of their heart.

Abraham brought out the central point of the reading in his question at the end of verse 25, "Far be it from You to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous and the wicked are treated alike. Far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?" The answer, one that is woven throughout the narrative of the decreasing numbers, is a resounding yes. Yes, the Judge of all the earth shall do justly, including destroying the wicked. Although in our day, God mostly withholds judgment of the "wicked" until after they die, the Bible is clear that judgment is a certainty for those who deny the Lord Jesus and don't yield to His Holy Spirit in giving up their sinful lives.

It is helpful to read what Saint Peter wrote about today's story and Lot:

> *2 Peter 2:6-9 NAS95 6 (emphasis added) and if He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing them to ashes, having made them an example to those who would live ungodly lives thereafter; 7 and if He rescued* ***righteous Lot****, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men 8 (for by what he saw and heard that righteous man, while living among them, felt his righteous soul tormented day after day by their lawless deeds), 9 then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment,*

Peter's explanation helps us to understand the implications of living a **lifelong** pattern of sin without repenting through God's empowerment found through faith in Jesus Christ. Peter was clear that we are to learn from other's mistakes, and Sodom and Gomorrah stand as a "doozie" of an example useful to all of us today. Paul said, "Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come" (1 Corinthians 10:11). This leads us to the main point of the reading. If Lot can find forgiveness and faith in God in spite of the series of poor choices he made, we can do the same. God stands ready to forgive us of our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9b-ff). Through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, we are motivated to confess our sins (1 John 1:9a) and receive God's blessing upon our lives, demonstrated by our service to Him.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The context of the second reading from Colossians continued from last week (Colossians 1:24-28) but skips forward to verse 12 of the second chapter. The context of the omitted verses 1 -11 in the second chapter leading up to today's reading is Paul's affirmation of Jesus' humanity and divinity, something which the Gnostics opposed. This was because the false teachers who had infiltrated the church taught that, since only the spirit was good in contrast to evil flesh, the person of the Lord Jesus could not have truly manifested Himself as divinity in the flesh. Paul said, "For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form" (Colossians 2:9). He also taught the Colossian church how they were complete in Christ Jesus and spiritually circumcised in their heart without the necessity of the physical operation itself (vv. 10-11). The reading continues with essential teachings on a Christian's identity in Christ.

Second Reading:

> *Colossians 2:12-14 NAS95 12 having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. 13 When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, 14 having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.*

Paul taught that as believers, our spiritually dead carnal life is buried in baptism as a picture of being born from the Spirit of God. When a person is immersed in baptism, they make a statement that their sins are buried with Jesus Christ's burial, but when they emerge from the water, they are

raised in the newness of life, similarly to when Jesus rose from the dead. Although Jesus was dead, God raised Him from the dead (v. 12d). Through faith, God in a sense raised believers from the dead (v. 12c). In addition, as believers, God forgave all of our sins – past, present and future (v. 13) and nailed the record of our transgressions to the cross of Christ (v. 14). This hostile "certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us" (v. 14a) has been forever taken away from us!

What does it mean to have all of our sins taken away, forever, with even the record of them being destroyed? One aspect is that if Satan (or we do in ourselves) brings our past sins back into our mind, we can call upon God in prayer to fight this spiritual battle raging against us with a one-hundred-percent specific outcome. This is because, as believers, God has forgiven us through the precious blood of Jesus Christ. Only when we doubt our standing as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ can these attacks harm our minds. Another aspect is that we can trust that although people may bring up our past sins, God will never do it. Through Jesus Christ, God has placed our sins as far as the East is from the West (Psalm 103:12).

Next, as we turn to the Gospel reading, we will learn something from the Lord Jesus about how He instructed His disciples to pray specifically concerning their needs. This study will be helpful because we know that prayer is the antidote to worry that comes when our enemies (spiritual and physical) bring up our past sins.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading from Luke is the Lord Jesus' teaching on prayer, which He gave in response to one of His disciples' questions: "Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples." As you read, begin to develop a list of bullet points from Jesus' teaching. Ask, "What is Jesus teaching me about prayer?"

Gospel Reading:

> *Luke 11:1-13 NAS95 1 It happened that while Jesus was praying in a certain place, after He had finished, one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples." 2 And He said to them, "When you pray, say: 'Father, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. 3 Give us each day our daily bread. 4 And forgive us our sins, For we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation." 5 Then*

> *He said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and goes to him at midnight and says to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves; 6 for a friend of mine has come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; 7 and from inside he answers and says, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been shut and my children and I are in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.' 8 I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs. 9 So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 10 For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it will be opened. 11 Now suppose one of you fathers is asked by his son for a fish; he will not give him a snake instead of a fish, will he? 12 Or if he is asked for an egg, he will not give him a scorpion, will he? 13 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?"*

What can we learn about prayer from the Lord Jesus? The big idea of Jesus' teaching on prayer was to pray to the Person of the Father, pray specifically, and pray persistently. Prayer is an antidote to worry, as when Satan brings to mind our past sins, as we just mentioned in the second reading. In order for this to be an antidote to worry, we must enter into the reality of this prayer, not just recite it. Here are some other points that we can learn about prayer from today's reading.

- 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. His holiness creates a foundation of trust for us to surrender our will to His will and 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 our lives. Instead of worrying about how I will make it in this world, I am now focused on being used by God to bring His ways to bear on this world.

- He forgives us, and we can extend forgiveness to others through His strength. This is 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?

- God calls us to be specific in our prayers. If we (or others) are sick, Jesus teaches us to pray that we may be well. This may be intuitive to you, but how often have you been ill and not prayed for your own healing? Perhaps Jesus will allow sickness in your own life, such as by giving you compassion for others who are sick.

- God calls us to be persistent in prayer. This is clear not only in today's teaching but also in Jesus' teaching on the parable of the persistent widow (Luke 18:1-8). In that case, Jesus applauded the efforts of a woman who continually nagged a judge to resolve her case. Jesus calls us to be persistent.

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

As believers, we can be confident that God hears our prayers and answers them. John said, "This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him" (1 John 5:14-15). The key is praying according to God's will. We do that by learning His will; the way to do that is to study His revealed will in the Bible, the Word of God. God's answers to our prayers may not be as we expect. He may answer yes or no, wait, or lead us in another direction to pray. God calls us to pray boldly, as we see in Hebrews: "Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16).

We hope that what you have learned today will help you to pray more effectively and fervently by having the confidence that God will hear and answer you. Over the years, I have prayed for a very long list (about 150) of people each day concerning their salvation. Over almost two decades, I have seen God answer my prayers miraculously. In one case, a man who had experienced God's miraculous intervention in an accident came to know the Lord Jesus much later in his life as a result of a second drunk driving arrest. This was a man that I had been praying for over the course of about 15 years. He later told me that he had felt called to God that entire time, which was the natural outcome of what had to happen. He was thankful for God bringing him to this point of decision by using the bad events in his life to turn him around onto the track of following Him. Perhaps one of my faithful readers will recognize the person about whom I am speaking. May God be glorified in all we do, and may we praise Him for His intervention.

Reflection Questions

1. Today we learned something from Jesus about how to pray. In what ways does Jesus' teaching challenge your current prayer life?

2. Reflect on some of your urgent prayers to God in the past year. Were any of these written in a journal? How were these prayers answered? How helpful would it be for you to write down certain prayer requests in a journal in order to be able to remember and to look back and update them with notes about how God responded? Consider starting a prayer journal and using note cards to write down the urgent prayer requests you carry daily.

Sunday Mass Study Notes for 07-28-2024

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we see in the first reading, a miracle by the Prophet Elisha in multiplying of the loaves to feed a large crowd. Later in the Gospel lesson we see Jesus doing something similar but on a larger scale in the feeding of the five thousand. We also study Paul's Letter to the Ephesians and see some godly behaviors to which God calls us to walk as His true followers.

Some years ago this month I was able to take an extended holiday to the south of France along with my wife. During this time, I was able to unplug from my work in the IT industry and to meet up with a couple who were involved that country. This loving couple epitomizes the calling given by Paul that we will see in the second reading today "*to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love*" (Ephesians 4:1c-2). In spite of their many hardships they have endured during their forty years of ministry in France, they have persisted and seen many people grow in their faith. They are an inspiration to me when I too encounter difficulties in helping people to grow in their faith.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from Second Kings in the section where Elijah's replacement Elisha ministered

during the time of a great famine. Elisha was a great prophet who provided for the people in a similar way in which Jesus did in the feeding of the five thousand which we will read later in the Gospel lesson. Elisha performed this miracle right after he raised the son of the Shunammite woman and the rendering of a poison pot of stew into healthy food.

First Reading:

> *2 Kings 4:42-44 NAS95 42 Now a man came from Baal-shalishah, and brought the man of God bread of the first fruits, twenty loaves of barley and fresh ears of grain in his sack. And he said, "Give them to the people that they may eat." 43 His attendant said, "What, will I set this before a hundred men?" But he said, "Give them to the people that they may eat, for thus says the LORD, 'They shall eat and have some left over.'" 44 So he set it before them, and they ate and had some left over, according to the word of the LORD.*

Here Elisha multiplied through God's power some twenty barley loaves into a quantity sufficient to feed one hundred men and most likely their women and children. God used Elisha in many such ways to reveal His power and to call the people to follow the One True God. In a similar way, Jesus used signs to reveal the source of His true power and to point the people to faith in Him (=God). Elisha was different though because he rightly didn't claim to be God or the Messiah, but rather pointed the way to Him through the revelation of His power with signs and miracles.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from Ephesians 4. The context is following Paul's stating of the revelation of the mystery of God that the Gentiles were fellow heirs with the Jews in the kingdom of God (Ephesians 4:6). Paul explained that he was a minister to the Gentiles (Ephesians 3:8) and how he prayed that the Ephesians would understand the riches of God's glory and to "know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge" (3:19).

Second Reading:

> *Ephesians 4:1-6 NAS95 1 Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, 3 being diligent to*

> *preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.*

God calls us to "walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which we have been called" (v. 1). What is this calling? The key lies in the adverb "therefore." As we have seen in previous editions of Mass Notes, we have to ask "what is it there for"? In this case it links this passage to the previous doctrine described in chapter 3: "8 To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, 9 and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; 10 so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 3:8-10). God is making a point to the rulers and authorities in heavenly places (the supernatural realm) about Who He is through the church (you and me and fellow believers). It's not just about me and what I get out of my church experience. Instead, my life becomes about walking in a way that reflects God's glory to the observant supernatural realm. What does this look like? Paul said it includes attitudes of humility, gentleness, having patience, "showing tolerance for one another in love," and working to preserve unity "in the bond of peace."

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The Gospel lesson is Jesus' feeding of the five thousand along the shores of the Sea of Galilee. This chapter of John marks the beginning of a series of turning points and especially the one we will study in future weeks in an easy to remember chapter and verse: 6:66. These turning points come about as the people begin to determine in their hearts whether they are true followers of Jesus. One of these turning points occurred in the previous chapter. "For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God" (John 5:18). This is where the rubber meets the road; the true followers of God are those that recognize Jesus as God in the flesh, the Messiah, rather than just a miracle doer who they thought would deliver them from their Roman oppressors.

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> *John 6:1-15 NAS95 1 After these things Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee (or Tiberias). 2 A large crowd followed Him, because they saw the signs which He was performing on those who were sick. 3 Then Jesus went up on the mountain, and there He sat down with His disciples. 4 Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was near. 5 Therefore*

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As the story progressed, Jesus asked Philip (who was from this region) to provide for the crowd. Philip responded to Jesus showing that he had resources in the amount of 200 days wages, a significant amount but worthless that far away from the city and in light of the huge size of the crowd. Evidently, the disciples two by two ministry in the preceding weeks had been fruitful in terms of donations. Nevertheless, the people had followed Jesus some distance away from the city and saw Him as One Who would provide for them, so it was natural for Jesus to accommodate their needs through His disciples. In this case, the people found out that God was the true multiplier of things. The people did indeed recognize Jesus as a Prophet, seemingly the One prophesied about in Deuteronomy 18:15. However, they misunderstood the role of the Messiah (vv. 14 – 15). The people saw in Jesus a political ruler Who could free them from their poverty and Roman oppression. In the end, twelve baskets were left over corresponding exactly to the count of Jesus' disciples. Each disciple was left with one basket to highlight Jesus' ability to provide in the midst of impossible circumstances. God provided the food regardless of the people's faith and used this sign to point to the True Messiah Jesus.

We too may have misunderstandings about how Jesus' power should be used in the world. Though we should ask God to provide for our circumstances, we have to recognize that like the people of the biblical era we often want God to use His power for our comfort, security, and advancement. We need to careful to let God be God and not expect Him to be our personal "Genie in the bottle" performing miracles on demand. Nobody stands above for His is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords and His purposes are beyond understanding. Even though the people in this story wanted Jesus to become their civil King, instead Jesus ministered to them to meet their spiritual needs. One day Jesus will return to rule and reign on the earth and fulfil the expectations of a perfect ruler.

Reflection Questions

1. In the second reading we read God's calling for us to "walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which we have been called" (Ephesians 4:1). List some ways in which you may walk in a manner worthy of a heavenly calling. What are some specific things to which God may be calling you to change in your life?

2. In the Gospel lesson Jesus called upon God's miraculous power to perform a miracle to provide for people's basic needs and at the same time to confirm Himself as the Messiah. It is evident from reading the synoptic Gospels that His disciples didn't understand the miracle until Jesus explained it to them some time later after feeding a second large crowd. What ways have you missed understanding the miracles of God in your own life? List two or three ways in which God has recently provided for you that you may have taken for granted. Tell God your thankfulness for His provision and ask Him to point out to you ways in which He continues to do so.

Sunday Mass Study Notes for 07-25-2021



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we see in the first reading a miracle by the Prophet Elisha in multiplying of the loaves to feed a large crowd. Later in the Gospel lesson we see Jesus doing something similar but on a larger scale in the feeding of the five thousand. We also study Paul's Letter to the Ephesians and see some godly behaviors to which God calls us to walk as His true followers.

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Two years ago this month I was able to take an extended holiday to the south of France along with my wife. During this time, I was able to unplug from my work in the IT industry and to meet up with a couple who is involved that country. This loving couple epitomizes the calling given by Paul that we will see in the second reading today "*to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love*" (Ephesians 4:1c-2). In spite of their many hardships they have endured during their forty years of ministry in France they have persisted and seen many people grow in their faith. They are an inspiration to me when I too encounter difficulties in helping people to grow in their faith.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from Second Kings in the section where Elijah's replacement Elisha ministered during the time of a great famine. Elisha was a great prophet who provided for the people in a similar way in which Jesus did in the feeding of the five thousand which we will read later in the Gospel lesson. Elisha performed this miracle right after he raised the son of the Shunammite woman and the rendering of a poison pot of stew into healthy food.

First Reading:

2 Kings 4:42-44 NAS95 42 Now a man came from Baal-shalishah, and brought the man of God bread of the first fruits, twenty loaves of barley and fresh ears of grain in his sack. And he said, "Give them to the people that they may eat." 43 His attendant said, "What, will I set this before a hundred men?" But he said, "Give them to the people that they may eat, for thus says the LORD, 'They shall eat and have some left over.'" 44 So he set it before them, and they ate and had some left over, according to the word of the LORD.

Here Elisha multiplied through God's power some twenty barley loaves into a quantity sufficient to feed one hundred men and most likely their women and children. God used Elisha in many such ways to reveal His power and to call the people to follow the One True God. In a similar way, Jesus used signs to reveal the source of His true power and to point the people to faith in Him (=God). Elisha was different though because he rightly didn't claim to be God or the Messiah but rather pointed the way to Him through the revelation of His power through signs and miracles.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from Ephesians 4. The context is following Paul's stating of the revelation of the mystery of God that the Gentiles were fellow heirs with the Jews in the kingdom of God (Ephesians 4:6). Paul explained that he was a minister to the Gentiles (Ephesians 3:8) and how he prayed that the Ephesians would understand the riches of God's glory and to "know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge" (3:19).

Second Reading:

Ephesians 4:1-6 NAS95 1 Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, 3 being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for 07-26-2020



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we open with the Old Testament reading that describes King Solomon's prayer for wisdom. Our New Testament reading describes God's vision for each follower to be conformed to the image of His Son, Jesus. This is truly wise living. In the Gospel lesson, we continue with more of Jesus' teaching on parables from last week. He provides short stories of wise people who valued the Kingdom of Heaven above all else and inherited life eternal.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The context for this story is after the death of King David. Israel was in its "golden era" having subdued its enemies and established itself as a nation. Solomon was David's son by Bathsheba and succeeded David on the throne. We catch a glimpse of his heart as he begins his reign over Israel.

First Reading:

5 In Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream at night; and God said, "Ask what you wish me to give you." 6 Then Solomon said, "You have shown great lovingkindness to Your servant David my father, according as he walked before You in truth and righteousness and uprightness of heart toward You; and You have reserved for him this great lovingkindness, that You have given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day. 7 Now, O LORD my God, You have made Your servant king in place of my father David, yet I am but a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. 8 Your servant is in the midst of Your people which You have chosen, a great people who are too many to be numbered or counted. 9 So give Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people to discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?" 10 It was pleasing in the sight of the Lord that Solomon had asked this thing. 11 God said to him, "Because you have asked this thing and have not asked for yourself long life, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have you asked for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself discernment to understand justice, 12 behold, I have done according to your words. Behold, I have given you a wise and discerning heart, so that there has been no one like you before you, nor shall one like you arise after you. (1 Kings 3:5-12)

These verses show us the beginning steps of King Solomon. Some important observations include:

- God came to Solomon in a dream
- God invited Solomon to ask Him for whatever he wished
- Solomon recognized God's great loving-kindness (fiercely loyal love) before answering
- Solomon also recognized his finiteness and sense of inadequacy for the important role that he was being placed in
- Solomon asked for an understanding heart to judge the people of Israel and to discern between good and evil
- God granted this request and blessed him with wisdom

If you know the rest of the story, you may be confused with how a person could be granted a wise and discerning heart and yet end up being led astray by all of the women (700 of them) he was married to (1 Kings 11:3). I wonder if his great wisdom came through the school of hard knocks. For at the end of his life he confesses: "The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person" (Ecclesiastes 12:13). No matter how much wealth, power and status, the wisest man on earth concludes that fearing God is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10).

You may not be a king, but we can all come to God and ask Him for wisdom. James 1:5 says, "If any

of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him." We all have roles in life that are challenging. We can follow Solomon's lead and recognize God's fiercely loyal love and our inadequacy. This should lead us with humility and desperation before the true King of kings as we ask our Heavenly Father for what we really need: wisdom.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from the New Testament, Saint Paul's letter to the Romans, which is a continuation of what we read last week. Paul is in the middle of declaring the victory that believers have through Christ. But the victory comes through the back door of recognizing our weakness as humans. This echoes King Solomon's prayer for wisdom in the earlier reading. For it is in our weakness that we find help from the Holy Spirit, who is interceding for us according to the will of God the Father (Romans 8:27).

Second Reading:

28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. 29 For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; 30 and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified. (Romans 8:28-30)

This passage, in its context, casts an inspiring and hopeful vision for followers of Christ. For it declares that God uses all things for His good purposes. While not all things that happen in this life are good, God is able to use every circumstance (pleasurable and painful) to accomplish His predestined will: to conform us to image of His Son. He wants us to look like Christ. That's what this life is all about. That is God's vision for us as His followers. The question for us is, how badly do we want His vision for our lives? Are we willing to let God conform us to the image of His Son and work all things together for good, or are we wanting to just "get enough of God" in order to go to heaven when we die? There is a foundational condition for having all things work together for good: this comes to one who loves God and allows Him to work out His good purposes in his or her life. What this implies is trust and surrender to God's bigger purposes. He knows what is best for us. Someday we will agree wholeheartedly with Him.

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Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

In the Gospel lesson this week we continue with Jesus' teaching to His disciples through parables that we looked at the past two weeks.

Gospel Reading:

44 "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. 45 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, 46 and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it. 47 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet cast into the sea, and gathering fish of every kind; 48 and when it was filled, they drew it up on the beach; and they sat down and gathered the good fish into containers, but the bad they threw away. 49 So it will be at the end of the age; the angels will come forth and take out the wicked from among the righteous, 50 and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 51 Have you understood all these things?" They said to Him, "Yes." 52 And Jesus said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a head of a household, who brings out of his treasure things new and old." (Matthew 13:44-52)

Jesus is away from the crowds (Matthew 13:36) and now teaches His disciples in parables, something which He previously did only when the crowds were present. The main subject is the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus paints a few broad brush strokes to entice His followers to continue their costly pursuit of being a disciple of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Jesus likens the Kingdom of Heaven to a hidden treasure and a pearl of great price. In the parable of the hidden treasure the man isn't searching for it, in contrast the man in the parable of the pearl is on an active search to locate valuable peals. Both parables, though, require a sacrifice on the part of the would-be owners of the precious goods. But the sacrifice is insignificant for the joy of obtaining the truly valuable treasure. Jesus is helping us to see that the Kingdom of Heaven is worth every seeming sacrifice that is made in order to walk with Him in this world. Jesus' kingdom is only partially here, and these parables illustrate the great value of this down payment on the full kingdom, the mystery of life eternal.

The apostle Paul understood clearly the surpassing value of a discipleship relationship to Jesus: "I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things" (Phil. 3:8).

The last illustration of the Kingdom of Heaven is very striking. It is that of a dragnet that is tossed out to catch fish. In the end of the age, the fish will be sorted out. The good will go to containers and the bad will be thrown out. Jesus gives the explanation clearly. The wicked will be sorted out from the righteous and will be thrown into the furnace of fire (referring to a literal Hell). The prospects of an eternity with weeping and gnashing of teeth is almost too much to fathom. But Jesus, in His kindness, gives us insight into eternity. In this life we have a lot of choices to make, but the most important one is where we will spend eternity. Based on our sin, we have only one label that we can claim: wicked. "There is none righteous, not even one" (Romans 3:10). We cannot claim the label "righteous," no matter how good we try to be. But Jesus, who was righteous came to give us the label and identity of "righteous" by taking the punishment of our wickedness on the cross and giving us His righteousness. "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). So while we don't deserve the label of righteous, we can choose to have it, if we will receive God's gift of eternal life. It's a gift, though. It doesn't count until you receive it. Have you placed your faith in God's gift of eternal life through Christ? Are you counting on this for your salvation?

If so, you are a disciple of the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus said that each one who is following Him into His Kingdom brings out treasures that are new and old. This means that we have a growing testimony of God's valuable work in our lives. We can speak of the current work that He is doing and the past work that He has done. We are cooperating with His vision to conform us into the image of His Son, for we know that the Son is our most valuable treasure indeed.

Reflection Questions

1. What does it really mean to be a disciple of the "Kingdom of Heaven?" What are one or two ways in which this played out in your life this week?

2. What "sacrifices" have you made to be a disciple of the Kingdom of Heaven? How do these parables help you to know that it is worth it?

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3. How does the story of Solomon asking for wisdom illustrate the parable of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl of Great Price? In what areas do you want God to help you become wise and discerning about your own life and pursuits? Spend some time in prayer, asking Him for His perspective and wisdom for your life. Let Him know that you want to surrender to His vision for conforming you to the image of His Son.

Mass-Study-Notes-for-Sunday_07-26-2020Download

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 07-28-2019



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we cover three excellent readings in which we learn more about God's righteous nature, the forgiveness that we have through Jesus Christ, and how Jesus teaches us to pray.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading from Genesis picks up where we left off in last week's reading where we saw Abraham meet with two angels and the Lord Jesus Himself. This week's reading deals with

Abraham's pleading with God concerning the people of the region of Sodom and Gomorrah. These cities were located just north of the Dead Sea in an area known for its great fertility. Today's reading chronicles the events leading up to the destruction of the cities turning them into the wasteland that they are today.

First Reading:

> *Genesis 18:20-32 NAS95 20 And the LORD said, "The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah is indeed great, and their sin is exceedingly grave. 21 I will go down now, and see if they have done entirely according to its outcry, which has come to Me; and if not, I will know." 22 Then the men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, while Abraham was still standing before the LORD. 23 Abraham came near and said, "Will You indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? 24 Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; will You indeed sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous who are in it? 25 Far be it from You to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous and the wicked are treated alike. Far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?" 26 So the LORD said, "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare the whole place on their account." 27 And Abraham replied, "Now behold, I have ventured to speak to the Lord, although I am but dust and ashes. 28 Suppose the fifty righteous are lacking five, will You destroy the whole city because of five?" And He said, "I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there." 29 He spoke to Him yet again and said, "Suppose forty are found there?" And He said, "I will not do it on account of the forty." 30 Then he said, "Oh may the Lord not be angry, and I shall speak; suppose thirty are found there?" And He said, "I will not do it if I find thirty there." 31 And he said, "Now behold, I have ventured to speak to the Lord; suppose twenty are found there?" And He said, "I will not destroy it on account of the twenty." 32 Then he said, "Oh may the Lord not be angry, and I shall speak only this once; suppose ten are found there?" And He said, "I will not destroy it on account of the ten."*

The LORD told Abraham about the terrible sin of the people of the region of Sodom and Gomorrah (v. 20). The text says that the LORD would go "down" to Sodom (v. 20), a word which brings with it two meanings, geographically south and downwards spiritually. Looking back to chapter 13, we see how Abraham's nephew Lot chose to live in this fertile region when the land would not support both of their herds and there was a conflict among their herdsmen (Genesis 13:7). Abraham, a man who was well acquainted with God and knew of His grace and forgiveness, pleaded with the Lord Jesus before He went down to the region to judge them. We are not told how Abraham knew that the LORD's visit meant judgment. Regardless, Abraham began pleading on the basis of whether there were fifty righteous people in the cities would the LORD not destroy the people? Jesus' answer was implied as negative, there were not fifty righteous people in the region. After Abraham received this negative implication, he proceeded to boldly decrease the number, first to 40, then 30, 20, 10, and

finally just 5. By implication by not responding to Abraham's final question the region of Sodom and Gomorrah did not contain even five righteous people. What a terrible condition the region had come to without having even five righteous people in the region!

We may ask, how many righteous people were there in these cities? We know that there was at least one righteous person in the land, the person of Lot, or at least he came to be righteous in his later life after the destruction of the region of Sodom and Gomorrah in which he lived. Even if Lot was righteous in the eyes of the Lord, this would not have brought the total number to the value of five predicated by Abraham's question. We know that the LORD did not destroy Lot. Rather He sent the two angels with whom Abraham had met and they eventually led him away from the city before the fire rained down (Genesis 19:24-25). Looking a bit deeper at Lot, although he may or may not have a righteous man at the time of the story in Genesis 18, we do know that sometime later he repented and was added to the hall of faith in the New Testament. We also know that God spared the city of Zoar from destruction because of Lot's request (Genesis 19:20-21).

The rest of Lot's family didn't fare so well. We know that Lot's wife didn't make the grade (Genesis 19:26). The relationship between Lot's daughters and God is murky since we know that they later engaged in immoral sexual relations with their father since they felt that after the destruction of Sodom every man was dead and that they had to save the race from extinction (Genesis 19:19:31). This severe faithlessness may be abrogated a bit in light of the fact that they had just witnessed the terrible extermination of everyone in the region in which they lived by fire and brimstone raining from the sky (Genesis 19:24). This brings to mine the story of Elijah when he thought that he was the last believer alive in the entire world (1 Kings 19:14). Then the LORD reminded this great prophet during his brief season of faithlessness that there remained 7,000 who had or would be true to Him (1 Kings 19:18). So although Lot's daughters may have doubted God's promises made through Abraham we are not told the ultimate condition of their heart.

Abraham brought out the central point of the reading in his question at end of verse 25, "Far be it from You to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous and the wicked are treated alike. Far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?" The answer, one that is woven throughout the narrative of the decreasing numbers, is a resounding yes. Yes, the Judge of all the earth shall do justly, including the destruction of the wicked. Although in our day God mostly withholds judgment of the "wicked" until after they die, the Bible is clear that judgement is a certainty for those that deny the Lord Jesus and don't yield to His Holy Spirit in giving up their sinful lives.

It is useful to read what Saint Peter wrote about today's story and Lot:

> *2 Peter 2:6-9 NAS95 6 (emphasis added) and if He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing them to ashes, having made them an example to those who would live ungodly lives thereafter; 7 and if He rescued* ***righteous Lot****, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men 8 (for by what he saw and heard that righteous man, while living among them, felt his righteous soul tormented day after day by their lawless deeds), 9*

> *then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment,*

Peter's explanation helps us to understand the implications of living a **lifelong** pattern of sin without repenting through God's empowerment found through faith in Jesus Christ. Peter was clear that we are to learn from other's mistakes, and Sodom and Gomorrah stands as a "doozie" of an example useful to all of us today. Paul said, "Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come" (1Corinthians 10:11). This leads us to the main point of the reading. If Lot can find forgiveness and faith in God in spite of the series of poor choices he made, we took can do the same. God stands ready to forgive us of our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9b-ff). Through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, we are motivated to confess our sins (1 John 1:9a) and receive God's blessing upon our lives demonstrated by our service to Him.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The context of the second reading from Colossians continues from last week (Colossians 1:24-28) but skips forward to verse 12 of the second chapter. The context of the omitted verses 1 -11 in the second chapter leading up to today's reading is Paul's affirmation of Jesus' humanity and divinity, something which the Gnostics opposed. This was because the false teachers that had infiltrated the church taught that since only spirit was good in contrast to flesh that was evil, the person of the Lord Jesus could not have truly manifested Himself as divinity in the flesh. Paul said, "For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form" (Colossians 2:9). He also taught the Colossian church how they were complete in Christ Jesus and spiritually circumcised in their heart without the necessity of the physical operation itself (vv. 10-11). The reading continues with important teaching on a Christian's identity in Christ.

Second Reading:

> *Colossians 2:12-14 NAS95 12 having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. 13 When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, 14 having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.*

Paul taught that as believers our spiritually dead carnal life is buried in baptism as a picture of being born from the Spirit of God. When a person is immersed in baptism they make a statement that their sins are buried with Jesus Christ's burial, but when they emerge from the water they are raised in

the newness of life in a similar was as when Jesus rose from the dead. Although Jesus was dead, God raised Him from the dead (v. 12d). Through faith God in a sense raised believers from the dead (v. 12c). In addition, as believers God forgave all of our sins – past, present and future (v. 13) and nailed the record of our transgressions to the cross of Christ (v. 14). This hostile "certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us" (v. 14a) has been forever taken away from us!

What does it mean to have all of our sins taken away, forever, with even the record of them being destroyed? One aspect is that if Satan (or we do in our ourselves) brings our past sins back into our mind, we can call upon God in prayer to fight this spiritual battle raging against us with a one hundred percent certain outcome. This is because as believers our God has forgiven us through the precious blood of Jesus Christ. It is only when we doubt our standing as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ that these attacks can harm our minds. Another aspect is that we can trust that although people may bring up our past sins God will never do it. God through Jesus Christ has placed our sins as far as east is from west (Psalm 103:12).

Next, as we turn to the Gospel reading, we will learn something from the Lord Jesus about how He instructed His disciples to pray specifically concerning their needs. This study will be useful because we know that prayer is the antidote to worry that comes when our enemies (spiritual and physical) bring up our past sins.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading from Luke is the Lord Jesus' teaching on prayer that He gave in response to one of His disciple's questions, "Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples." As you read, begin to develop a list of bullet points from Jesus' teaching. Ask, what is Jesus teaching **me** about prayer?

Gospel Reading:

> *Luke 11:1-13 NAS95 1 It happened that while Jesus was praying in a certain place, after He had finished, one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples." 2 And He said to them, "When you pray, say: 'Father, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. 3 Give us each day our daily bread. 4 And forgive us our sins, For we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation." 5 Then He said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and goes to him at midnight and says to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves; 6 for a friend of mine has come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; 7 and from inside he answers and says, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been shut and my children and I are in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.' 8 I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs. 9 So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 10 For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it will be opened. 11 Now suppose one of you fathers is asked by his son for a fish; he will not give him a*

> *snake instead of a fish, will he? 12 Or if he is asked for an egg, he will not give him a scorpion, will he? 13 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?"*

What can we learn about prayer from the Lord Jesus? The big idea of Jesus' teaching on prayer was to pray to the Person of the Father, pray specifically and pray persistently. Prayer is an antidote to worry, as when Satan brings to mind our past sins as we just mentioned in the second reading. In order for this to be an antidote to worry, we must enter into the reality of this prayer, not just recite it. Here are some other points that we can learn about prayer from today's reading.

- 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. 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 forgives us, and through His strength we can extend forgiveness to others. This is 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?
- God calls us to be specific in our prayer. If we (or others) are sick Jesus is teaching us to pray that we may be well. This may be intuitive to you, but how often have you been sick and not prayed for your own healing? Perhaps Jesus will allow sickness in your own life such as to give you compassion for others who are sick.
- God calls us to be persistent in prayer. This is clear not only in today's teaching but also in Jesus' teaching on the parable of the persistent widow (Luke 18:1-8). In that case Jesus applauded the efforts of a woman who continually nagged a judge to resolve her case. Jesus calls us to be persistent.

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 believers, we can be confident that God not only hears our prayers, but answers them. John said, "This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him" (1 John 5:14-15). The key is praying according to God's will. We do that by learning His will, and the way to do that is to study His revealed will in the Bible, the Word of God. God's answers to our prayers may **not** be as we expect. He may answer yes, not, wait, or lead us in another direction to pray. God calls us to pray boldly as we see in Hebrews: "Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16).

We hope that what you have learned today will help you to pray more effectively and fervently by having the confidence that God will hear and answer you. Over the years I have prayed for a very long list (about 150) people each day concerning their salvation. Over the course of the last almost two decades I have seen God answer my prayers in miraculous ways. In one case a man who had experienced God's miraculous intervention in an accident came to know the Lord Jesus much later in his life as a result of a second drunk driving arrest. This was a man that I had been praying for over the course of about 15 years. He later told me that he had felt called to God during that entire time and this was the natural outcome of what had to happen. He was thankful for God bringing him to this point of decision by using the bad events in his life to turn him around onto the track of following Him. Perhaps one of my faithful readers will recognize the person about whom I am speaking. May God be glorified in all that we do and may we praise Him for His intervention.

Reflection Questions

1. Today we learned something from Jesus about how to pray. In what ways does Jesus' teaching challenge your current prayer life?
2. Think back at some of your urgent prayers you made to God in the past year. Were any of these written in a journal? How were these prayers answered? How helpful would it be for you to write down certain prayer requests in a journal in order to be able to remember and to look back and update them with notes about how God responded? Consider starting a prayer journal and using note cards to write down your urgent prayer requests that you carry with you each day.

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 7-30-2017



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we open with the Old Testament reading that describes King Solomon's prayer for wisdom. Our New Testament reading describes God's vision for each follower to be conformed to the image of His Son, Jesus. This is truly wise living. In the Gospel lesson, we continue with more of Jesus' teaching on parables from last week. He provides short stories of wise people who valued the Kingdom of Heaven above all else and inherited life eternal.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The context for this story is after the death of King David. Israel was in its "golden era" having subdued its enemies and established itself as a nation. Solomon was David's son by Bathsheba and succeeded David on the throne. We catch a glimpse of his heart as he begins his reign over Israel.

First Reading:

5 In Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream at night; and God said, "Ask what you wish me to give you." 6 Then Solomon said, "You have shown great lovingkindness to Your servant David my father, according as he walked before You in truth and righteousness and uprightness of heart toward You; and You have reserved for him this great lovingkindness, that You have given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day. 7 Now, O LORD my God, You have made Your servant king in place of my father David, yet I am but a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. 8 Your servant is in the midst of Your people which You have chosen, a great people who are too many to be

numbered or counted. 9 So give Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people to discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?" 10 It was pleasing in the sight of the Lord that Solomon had asked this thing. 11 God said to him, "Because you have asked this thing and have not asked for yourself long life, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have you asked for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself discernment to understand justice, 12 behold, I have done according to your words. Behold, I have given you a wise and discerning heart, so that there has been no one like you before you, nor shall one like you arise after you. (1 Kings 3:5-12)

These verses show us the beginning steps of King Solomon. Some important observations include:

- God came to Solomon in a dream
- God invited Solomon to ask Him for whatever he wished
- Solomon recognized God's great loving-kindness (fiercely loyal love) before answering
- Solomon also recognized his finiteness and sense of inadequacy for the important role that he was being placed in
- Solomon asked for an understanding heart to judge the people of Israel and to discern between good and evil
- God granted this request and blessed him with wisdom

If you know the rest of the story, you may be confused with how a person could be granted a wise and discerning heart and yet end up being led astray by all of the women (700 of them) he was married to (1 Kings 11:3). I wonder if his great wisdom came through the school of hard knocks. For at the end of his life he confesses: "The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person" (Ecclesiastes 12:13). No matter how much wealth, power and status, the wisest man on earth concludes that fearing God is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10).

You may not be a king, but we can all come to God and ask Him for wisdom. James 1:5 says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him." We all have roles in life that are challenging. We can follow Solomon's lead and recognize God's fiercely loyal love and our inadequacy. This should lead us with humility and desperation before the true King of kings as we ask our Heavenly Father for what we really need: wisdom.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from the New Testament, Saint Paul's letter to the Romans, which is a continuation of what we read last week. Paul is in the middle of declaring the victory that believers have through Christ. But the victory comes through the back door of recognizing our weakness as humans. This echoes King Solomon's prayer for wisdom in the earlier reading. For it is in our weakness that we find help from the Holy Spirit, who is interceding for us according to the will of God the Father (Romans 8:27).

Second Reading:

28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. 29 For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; 30 and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified. (Romans 8:28-30)

This passage, in its context, casts an inspiring and hopeful vision for followers of Christ. For it declares that God uses all things for His good purposes. While not all things that happen in this life are good, God is able to use every circumstance (pleasurable and painful) to accomplish His predestined will: to conform us to image of His Son. He wants us to look like Christ. That's what this life is all about. That is God's vision for us as His followers. The question for us is, how badly do we want His vision for our lives? Are we willing to let God conform us to the image of His Son and work all things together for good, or are we wanting to just "get enough of God" in order to go to heaven when we die? There is a foundational condition for having all things work together for good: this comes to one who loves God and allows Him to work out His good purposes in his or her life. What this implies is trust and surrender to God's bigger purposes. He knows what is best for us. Someday we will agree wholeheartedly with Him.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

In the Gospel lesson this week we continue with Jesus' teaching to His disciples through parables that we looked at the past two weeks.

Gospel Reading:

44 "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. 45 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, 46 and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it. 47 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet cast into the sea, and gathering fish of every kind; 48 and when it was filled, they drew it up on the beach; and they sat down and gathered the good fish into containers, but the bad they threw away. 49 So it will be at the end of the age; the angels will come forth and take out the wicked from among the righteous, 50 and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 51 Have you understood all these things?" They said to Him, "Yes." 52 And Jesus said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a head of a household, who brings out of his treasure things new and old." (Matthew 13:44-52)

Jesus is away from the crowds (Matthew 13:36) and now teaches His disciples in parables, something which He previously did only when the crowds were present. The main subject is the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus paints a few broad brush strokes to entice His followers to continue their costly pursuit of being a disciple of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Jesus likens the Kingdom of Heaven to a hidden treasure and a pearl of great price. In the parable of the hidden treasure the man isn't searching for it, in contrast the man in the parable of the pearl is on an active search to locate valuable peals. Both parables, though, require a sacrifice on the part of the would-be owners of the precious goods. But the sacrifice is insignificant for the joy of obtaining the truly valuable treasure. Jesus is helping us to see that the Kingdom of Heaven is worth every seeming sacrifice that is made in order to walk with Him in this world. Jesus' kingdom is only partially here, and these parables illustrate the great value of this down payment on the full kingdom, the mystery of life eternal.

The apostle Paul understood clearly the surpassing value of a discipleship relationship to Jesus: "I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things" (Phil. 3:8).

The last illustration of the Kingdom of Heaven is very striking. It is that of a dragnet that is tossed out to catch fish. In the end of the age, the fish will be sorted out. The good will go to containers and the bad will be thrown out. Jesus gives the explanation clearly. The wicked will be sorted out from the righteous and will be thrown into the furnace of fire (referring to a literal Hell). The prospects of an eternity with weeping and gnashing of teeth is almost too much to fathom. But Jesus, in His kindness, gives us insight into eternity. In this life we have a lot of choices to make, but the most important one is where we will spend eternity. Based on our sin, we have only one label that we can claim: wicked. "There is none righteous, not even one" (Romans 3:10). We cannot claim the label "righteous," no matter how good we try to be. But Jesus, who was righteous came to give us the label and identity of "righteous" by taking the punishment of our wickedness on the cross and giving us His righteousness. "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). So while we don't deserve the label of righteous, we can choose to have it, if we will receive God's gift of eternal life. It's a gift, though. It doesn't count until you receive it. Have you placed your faith in God's gift of eternal life through Christ? Are you counting on this for your salvation?

If so, you are a disciple of the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus said that each one who is following Him into His Kingdom brings out treasures that are new and old. This means that we have a growing testimony of God's valuable work in our lives. We can speak of the current work that He is doing and the past work that He has done. We are cooperating with His vision to conform us into the image of His Son, for we know that the Son is our most valuable treasure indeed.

Reflection Questions

1. What does it really mean to be a disciple of the "Kingdom of Heaven?" What are one or two ways in which this played out in your life this week?

2. What "sacrifices" have you made to be a disciple of the Kingdom of Heaven? How do these parables help you to know that it is worth it?

3. How does the story of Solomon asking for wisdom illustrate the parable of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl of Great Price? In what areas do you want God to help you become wise and discerning about your own life and pursuits? Spend some time in prayer, asking Him for His perspective and wisdom for your life. Let Him know that you want to surrender to His vision for conforming you to the image of His Son.

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