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

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 7-17-2016



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **7-17-2016**. This week we study a reading from Genesis where Abraham meets the pre-incarnate Lord Jesus Who provides him with an important confirmation of a promised blessing. We also look at a reading in Colossians and close with the story about Mary and Martha in the Gospel of Luke.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The context of the first reading from Genesis is the appearance of the Lord to Abraham when he was ninety-nine years old just after he had obeyed God's order to be circumcised (Genesis 17:24) along with his son Ishmael (v. 13) born through his handmaid. Just prior to this, God had reconfirmed His promise of a son through Sarah by saying, "But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you at this season next year" (Genesis 17:21).

First Reading:

Genesis 18:1-10 NAS95 1 Now the LORD appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, while he was sitting at the tent door in the heat of the day. 2 When he lifted up his eyes and looked, behold, three men were standing opposite him; and when he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth, 3 and said, "My lord, if now I have found favor in your sight, please do not pass your servant by. 4 Please let a little water be brought and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree; 5 and I will bring a piece of bread, that you may refresh yourselves; after

that you may go on, since you have visited your servant." And they said, "So do, as you have said." 6 So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah, and said, "Quickly, prepare three measures of fine flour, knead it and make bread cakes." 7 Abraham also ran to the herd, and took a tender and choice calf and gave it to the servant, and he hurried to prepare it. 8 He took curds and milk and the calf which he had prepared, and placed it before them; and he was standing by them under the tree as they ate. 9 Then they said to him, "Where is Sarah your wife?" And he said, "There, in the tent." 10 He said, "I will surely return to you at this time next year; and behold, Sarah your wife will have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent door, which was behind him.

Note how the reading opens with "Now the LORD appeared" (v. 1) and then says in the next verse, "three men were standing opposite him" (v. 2b). In order to understand what is happening in these verses we must look beyond the verses covered in the reading. Later in this chapter we see that "the men" (plural) departed and Abraham was left standing with the LORD (Genesis 18:22) at which point Abraham did his famous reasoning with God about whether there were any righteous men in Sodom (Genesis 18:23-32). Next the text says, "As soon as He had finished speaking to Abraham the LORD departed, and Abraham returned to his place" (Genesis 18:33). If the men departed but Abraham was left standing with the LORD what was happening was that Abraham was standing face to face with the preincarnate Jesus Christ. God appeared in the form of a man to Abraham through, what theologians call, a "Christophany." As Abraham rushed around to prepare a meal for the group of two men (who were angels as stated in Genesis 19:1) and the Lord Jesus, the Lord provided yet another confirmation of His promise to him as they ate together. Sarah also heard the promise as she listened from the tent door while the "men" ate outside (v. 10). The Lord told him, "I will surely return to you at this time next year; and behold, Sarah your wife will have a son" (v. 10).

For Abraham and all of those who walk by faith, this is an important passage that tells of God's story for redemption. Abraham is called the father of faith, because it was through him that the Messiah would come. He looked forward to redemption, while we look back in history at the cross, where the transaction took place. Jesus paid the price for our redemption and provides the way for us to be reconciled to the Father, resulting in eternal life. This re-confirmation of God's sending of a promised son delivered by none other than The Promised Son Himself provided an important foreshadowing of how God's promises may be trusted in the sending of the ultimate, final, only Son Jesus to the earth some two thousand years later.

God understands what we need in terms of confirmation of His promises during the times that we may be in doubt. In the same way that God understood Abraham's need for confirmation of His promise, we too may turn to God for the confirmation of the promises He has made to us. We do this first through understanding His promises, and then turning to the Scriptures to renew our understanding of the promises that we find there. In prayer, we affirm those promises and learn to stake our lives on what God has said. In our daily lives, we learn to walk by faith in God, trusting in His character and knowing that He will make good on His promises.

As we transition to the second reading, we will see the importance of understanding Jesus' true

humanity in light of the false teachings happening in the early church. Although Jesus appeared to Abraham in the form of man as we saw in the first reading, the Bible states that Jesus was born in the flesh through Mary in order to live a perfect, sinless life and then gave Himself as the final offering of sins forever.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from Saint Paul's Letter to the Colossians. It is vital to understand the context in which Paul is writing to the church at Colosse. Today's reading is from the opening chapter of the Book that is concerned with correcting the heretical beliefs of some in the Colossian church including elements of Gnosticism. This belief system taught that matter is evil, God is good and in the case of the Colossians, that Jesus was just another emanation of God and not fully God Himself in the flesh. They also taught that a special secret high knowledge (gnosis) was required for true salvation and spiritual enlightenment.

Second Reading:

Colossians 1:24-28 NAS95 24 Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions. 25 Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God, 26 that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, 27 to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. 28 We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.

Paul affirmed how Christ's body is the church for which he rejoices in his suffering (v. 24). The core of his message to the Colossians was how God had revealed through the church the mystery "which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints" (v. 26) which is "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (v. 26b-ff). It is through the reception and understanding of this mystery that believers are made complete in Christ.

A question that we must ask ourselves based on this text is whether Christ's sacrifice was sufficient or do we need to do something to add to it to make up what is lacking? What was Paul referring to when he said that his suffering filled up "what is lacking in Christ's afflictions."

The Scriptures are clear that God's work of redemption was finished on the cross when Jesus declared, "It is finished" (John 19:30). Hebrews 10:12 says, "But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God" (ESV), which further verifies that redemption was finished at the cross by Jesus' sacrifice. Paul himself affirms in various places and in various ways that Christ's work is sufficient to cover our sins. Cite numerous verses here.

God calls us to serve Him through our good works that flow out of a heart changed by God. This is clear from these verses in Ephesians:

Ephesians 2:8-10 NAS95 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.

James in the Book by his name described the nature of saving faith as that which produces good works for God (James 2:17). Rather than thinking that by doing God's work we are earning our salvation, God calls us instead to seek His will for our lives and accept the blessing of Jesus' finished work for us. In this way we may be presented to God as "complete in Christ" (Colossians 1:28) as we read in today's reading.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading from Luke picks up from last week's message regarding the Good Samaritan. This time instead of relating a *story* about a traveler on a road, Jesus and His disciples were themselves traveling on a road. We know from the context that the village that we will read about them entering is Bethany. This small city was located very close to Jerusalem.

Gospel Reading:

Luke 10:38-42 NAS95 38 Now as they were traveling along, He entered a village; and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home. 39 She had a sister called Mary, who was seated at the Lord's feet, listening to His word. 40 But Martha was distracted with all her preparations; and she came up to Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me." 41 But the Lord answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; 42 but only one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her."

The reading is a story about priority and motive. It's about the energy with which we do something. Martha busied herself with the dinner preparation while Mary sat at Jesus' feet listening to Him. This contrasts with how we saw Abraham and Sarah work together to prepare the meal for the Lord and then listened to Him during the meal (except Sarah listened from a distance). Here Mary allows Martha to serve while sitting down and listening to Jesus. This bothered Martha who then spoke up to Jesus about the situation. Jesus gently corrected Martha's misunderstanding of Mary's motives, thinking that she was being lazy and neglecting in the serving of their important guest. Jesus told Martha that Mary did choose correctly to sit and listen at the feet of Jesus.

It's not a bad thing that Martha desired to serve Jesus, but there can be a service that is devoid of relationship. This is inferred by the way that Martha talks to Jesus about Mary. Her service was no longer about meeting the needs of Jesus but was about keeping score and trying to validate herself. Mary on the other hand was willing to appear culturally inappropriate by sitting at the feet of Jesus with the rest of the men. She felt comfortable sitting at the feet of Jesus, which is normal place for the disciple in that cultural context. Mary seems to be the only that truly understood that Jesus had to die. We know that the Gospels record how Mary anointed Jesus that evening. It is very likely that

Jesus could smell Mary's anointing while He was hanging on the cross which would serve as a small comfort and blessing.

The main point of the reading is not that Jesus is reprimanding Martha for serving Him, but that He is saying that our serving needs to be connected to relationship (sitting at Jesus' feet). Mary showed true devotion to Christ not just by serving Him a meal but by being present and listening to Him. She understood that Jesus' time on the earth was drawing to a close, something that Jesus' own disciples failed to understand (Luke 18:34).

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. Abraham is the father of faith and needed confirmation of God's reliability. What promises of God are you standing on and how is God reconfirming your faith to trust Him? How can others support you in your journey to walk by faith?

2. In the Gospel reading we saw how Mary sat and listened to Jesus while Martha busied herself with the preparation of the meal. In what ways was Martha jealous of Mary? Was Mary being lazy? Why or who not?

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/071716.cfm

Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Lectionary: 108

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, 10-18-2015



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **10-18-2015**. This week Marla shares by opening with Isaiah 53: 10-11, which is part of a chapter that depicts in graphic detail Jesus' suffering and death for our sin. Then she turns to a passage in Hebrews 4:14-16 that shows how Jesus has faced the same temptations we face and as a result, is not only sympathetic to us in our struggles but can give us victory over them. Finally she concludes with the Gospel of St. Mark 10: 35-45 where Jesus tells us the key to greatness is being a servant of all.

Introduction to the First Reading:

Isaiah 53 gives one of the clearest depictions in the Old Testament of Jesus as the suffering servant, as it predicts in devastating detail His rejection, humiliation, and death for our sin. Although the prophet Isaiah doesn't reveal the name of this suffering servant, later generations understood that only Jesus in His death fully corresponded to the one depicted here. This was confirmed by many New Testament writers as they quoted from Isaiah 53 in speaking of Christ. (1 Peter 2: 21-24 is a prime example.)

What Jesus suffered for our sin in order to redeem us is sobering. The 10 verses that precede the First Reading reveal the awful truth. He was despised and forsaken. Furthermore, He was smitten (struck), afflicted, pierced, crushed, chastened, scourged, and oppressed (Isaiah 53:3-7). Yet, "*He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth*" (v.9). His death was truly the just dying for the unjust that He might bring us to God (1 Peter 3:18).

Jesus did not open His mouth in protest because He knew He was fulfilling the Father's will.

Referring to His life Jesus said, "*No one has taken it away from me, but I lay it down on my own initiative* (Gospel of St. John 10:18).

The next verses, which comprise the First Reading, may seem puzzling at first, for they teach us that the suffering Jesus endured was according to God's *good pleasure*. The word *pleasure* here does not mean happiness but that all would take place according to the LORD's will. As you read the First Reading note the Father's purpose for the Son's suffering.

First Reading:

Isaiah 53:10-11 NAS95 10 But the LORD was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; If He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, And the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand. 11 As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, As He will bear their iniquities.

Our iniquity (sin) separates us from God, but the LORD caused the iniquity of us all to fall on His Son (Is. 53:6). Jesus took our guilt and punishment, and by His suffering we are justified, that is, made right before God and restored to a right relationship with Him.

As we consider Christ's suffering and sacrifice on our behalf, let us seek to live out that sacrificial love for the benefit of others. One of the most important ways we can love others is to introduce them to Jesus and tell them of the One who suffered on their behalf.

The Second Reading speaks about another kind of suffering—the struggle against temptation. Jesus faced it and was victorious. When we face temptation, we don't face it alone. We have someone who understands and helps.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The Second Reading takes us to a group of verses set in a larger context that speaks of Jesus as our high priest. In the Old Testament sacrificial system, when someone sinned, he would bring an animal to the priest and the priest would sacrifice it (shed its blood) on the altar in the tabernacle/temple. Behind a heavy curtain was the Holy of Holies (or Holy Place) where God would appear in a pillar of cloud or fire. No one could go in there except the high priest, and he could go in only once a year on the Day of Atonement. On that day the high priest would make a sacrifice for himself (for he is a sinner, too) and for the sins of all the people and carry the blood inside the curtain and present it to God. The sacrifice had to be repeated year after year.

Hebrews Ch. 7 and 9 tell us that Jesus is a high priest, but one far superior to the human ones we read about in the Old Testament. And here's why:

Jesus himself was both the high priest *and* the sacrifice for sin. His sacrifice was perfect and total, and God accepted it as final. There was no need for any further sacrifice. No more work needed to be done to procure our salvation. Jesus had done it all. He rested from His work, and now as we hear the Gospel and believe, we enter into that place of rest. We cannot work for our salvation. We can only by faith enter into the salvation and rest Jesus has provided (See Hebrews 4:1-11).

Our First Reading along with all of Isaiah 53 depict the pain of rejection and suffering Jesus endured for our salvation. We don't have a high priest far removed from our pain and struggles but One who has experienced in a body like ours the sufferings of this world. Consequently He can sympathize with each of us in our weakness and suffering. This is true also of the temptations we face each day. He has faced them, too. Notice the comfort and encouragement found in our Second Reading.

Second Reading:

Hebrews 4:14-16 NAS95 14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. 16 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.

Because Jesus has faced the same temptations we face, we can come to Him and find mercy and grace in our time of need. He displays mercy as He sympathizes with our struggles, and He gives grace to overcome them. Because He was victorious, we can be also.

In the following Gospel Reading, the subject again turns to suffering as Jesus takes his 12 disciples aside and reveals disturbing details about his upcoming suffering and death.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

This week we return to the Gospel of Mark. While on a journey to Jerusalem, Jesus takes his 12 disciples aside and tells them of the suffering He will soon be facing. He will be delivered to the Jewish leaders who will condemn Him to death. Then He will be handed over to the Romans who will mock Him, spit on Him, scourge Him, and kill Him.

Knowing the culmination of Jesus' life was at hand and apparently believing He would soon set up His kingdom, James and John make a bold request. They ask to sit with Him in glory in places of honor at His right hand and His left. Jesus knew the path to glory was through the suffering of the cross, and that all who follow Him would likely suffer, too. Rejection, persecution, and even martyrdom awaited them. Did they know what they were asking for? Could they drink the cup of sorrow He would drink?

Jesus then reminds them that whoever wishes to be great among them doesn't do it by seeking a place of honor or authority. Earthly rulers seek honor, authority, and power and lord it over their subjects. But this is not the way of God. Notice in the Gospel Reading how someone can be great in God's kingdom.

Gospel Reading:

Mark 10:35-45 NAS95 35 James and John, the two sons of Zebedee, came up to Jesus, saying, "Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask of You." 36 And He said to them, "What do you want Me to do for you?" 37 They said to Him, "Grant that we may sit, one on Your right and one on Your left, in Your glory." 38 But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" 39 They said to Him, "We are able." And Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you shall drink; and you shall be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized. 40 But to sit on My right or on My left, this is not Mine to give; but it is for those for whom it has been prepared." 41 Hearing this, the ten began to feel indignant with James and John. 42 Calling them to Himself, Jesus said to them, "You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them. 43 But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; 44 and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. 45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

True godly leadership requires serving. In St. John's Gospel, the apostle John recounts how Jesus demonstrated servanthood by humbly washing the disciples' feet—a job reserved for the household servants. Jesus told His disciples, "*If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you*" (St. John 13:14-15).

Serving sometimes requires not just humility but sacrifice and suffering. Jesus demonstrated His willingness to suffer by dying for our sins on the cross, the ultimate act of service. Are we willing to follow Jesus' example and serve one another, even if it results in suffering? Whoever wishes to be great among us must humbly serve. For even Jesus himself came not to be served but to serve and give his life a ransom for many (v. 45).

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. Read all of Isaiah 53 and contemplate all Jesus suffered on your behalf. How does this motivate you to serve Him more?

2. Jesus lived a life of sacrifice and service. Who is God calling you to serve today? Write down ways you can do that. Be specific and be thankful for the opportunity to follow in Jesus' steps.

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Readings for the Week

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http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/101815.cfm

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Mass Study Notes for Sunday 3-22-2015



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **3-22-2015**. This week Marla shares the study of the readings beginning with Jeremiah 31 in which we see God's promise of a new covenant with Israel. Then she moves onto the second reading from the Book of Hebrews and then closes with the Gospel lesson from John 12. As we come nearer to the celebration of Good Friday and Easter Sunday the focus of the Bible passages continues to point us towards the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross and His resurrection in glory.

The first reading from the prophet Jeremiah is about love, promises, and a special family relationship, broken and restored. I love my family and express my love with affectionate names. I call my husband "Hon," my daughter "Sweets," and my son "Sonnybun." I speak of them with endearing words because we are family, and they mean the world to me.

In the Old Testament God speaks of the nation of Israel in intimate terms. He made a covenant (promise) with Abraham that his offspring would be God's chosen people and the whole world would be blessed through them. God and Israel were bound together much like a husband and wife, and God spoke of her in tender and loving terms as a husband speaks of his bride. But when Israel rebelled and turned away from God, her sin was likened to adultery or whoredom. God had been faithful, but Israel had broken her promise.

The book of Jeremiah records the coming judgment. God's judgment on his people was not intended to destroy them but to restore them to himself. Though they would be taken away into captivity by a foreign power, God would keep his promise, bring them back, and make a new covenant with them. That covenant is still in effect today, and here is the good news—that covenant includes us! The first reading explains it as follows.

First Reading: Jeremiah 31:31-34

31 "Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, 32 not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. 33 "But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. 34 They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares the LORD, "for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

The Old Covenant had a law written on tablets of stone. When Israel disobeyed that law they sinned. The Bible says that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin (Hebrews 9:22). In the days of Israel, sins were covered but not taken away by the blood of repeated animal sacrifices in an earthly temple. But the New Covenant is far superior to that (see Hebrews 10: 1-25). God gave Jesus his Son as the perfect sacrifice for sin. He is the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (St. John 1: 29). His death on the cross is the final sacrifice for sin and cleanses the sinner (and we are all sinners, Romans 3:23) completely.

Now we have the law of God not on stones but in our hearts. Each of us can receive Jesus by faith and know him in a personal way. When we accept what Jesus has done for us and believe in Him, our restoration to God is complete, and He can once more call us by His affectionate names—child, friend, and bride (St. John 1:12; 15:15; Rev. 19:7, 22:17).

The second reading takes us to a set of verses in a larger passage that speaks of Jesus as our high priest. In the Old Testament sacrificial system, when someone sinned, he would bring an animal to the priest and the priest would sacrifice it (shed its blood) on the altar in the tabernacle/temple. Behind a heavy curtain was the Holy of Holies (or Holy Place) where God would appear in a pillar of cloud or fire. No one could go in there except the high priest, and he could go in only once a year on the Day of Atonement. On that day the high priest would make a sacrifice for himself (for he is a sinner, too) and for the sins of all the people and carry the blood inside the curtain and present it to God. The sacrifice had to be repeated year after year.
Before we read the second reading, first we want to look at Hebrews Ch. 7 and 9 which tell us that Jesus is a high priest, but one far superior to the human ones we read about in the Old Testament.
Moreover, here's why:

Hebrews 7:26-27

"*For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself."*
Hebrews 9:11-12, 24-26

[11] But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; [12] and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption".

24 "For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; [25] nor was it that He would offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the holy place year by year with blood that is not his own. [26] Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself."
Jesus himself was both the high priest and the sacrifice for sin. His sacrifice was perfect and total, and God accepted it as final. That's why he is the source of eternal salvation to all those who obey him.
With that background we come to the second reading. It reveals the anguish Jesus experienced as he faced his impending death for sin.
Second Reading: Hebrews 5:7-9 NAS95

7 "In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him *from death, and He was heard because of His piety. 8 Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. 9 And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation,"*

The day has arrived that Jeremiah spoke about in our first reading: God would "*forgive their iniquity, and …remember [their sin] no more*" (Jer. 31:34). Jesus was going to inaugurate the New Covenant, but to do so would cost Him his life. If we had been walking past the garden on that evening, we would have heard loud cries of anguish coming from deep within the garden. Why was Jesus crying?

After all, He knew all along that He had come to die. The Bible says His life was not taken from Him; He willingly laid it down for us. It was in God's good plan before the world began. But the path to accomplishing that plan was so horrible to contemplate that it caused Jesus to cry out with loud cries and tears (Hebrews 5:7). Jesus knew what the prophet Isaiah foretold—that He would be *"pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins" (Isaiah 53: 5 NLT).* And so Jesus prayed, "*Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done"* (Luke 22:42). In this time of suffering and submission, Jesus' obedience was completed, made perfect. By perfect we don't at all mean there were flaws or sins or defects in Jesus that needed to be corrected. No, He was perfect in His being. P*erfect* in this verse has the idea of *being made complete.* You see, it wasn't until God the Son took on a human body that He experienced suffering in the flesh. In His suffering He learned obedience and, in doing so, was made complete.

Enduring the pain of rejection, loss, temptation, and suffering in a body like ours, Jesus became One who can sympathize with each of us in our weakness and suffering. We see this in another section of the Book of Hebrews:

Hebrews 4:15-16

15 "*For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. [16] 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."*

What a comfort to know that the One who saves us from our sins is also the One Who has walked the path we are walking and will give grace and help in our time of need. We can draw near to Him with complete confidence.

Moving onto the Gospel reading, we see Jesus himself acknowledging that the time has come to fulfill God's plan foretold in our first reading in Jer. 31.

Gospel Reading: John 12:20-33 NAS95

20 Now there were some Greeks among those who were going up to worship at the feast; 21 these then came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee, and began to ask him, saying, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." 22 Philip came and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip came and told Jesus. 23 And Jesus answered them, saying, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 24 "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. 25 He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal. 26 If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him. 27 Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour. 28 Father, glorify Your name." Then a voice came out of heaven: "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again." 29 So the crowd of people who stood by and heard it were saying that it had thundered; others were saying, "An angel has spoken to Him." 30 Jesus answered and said, "This voice has not come for My sake, but for your sakes. 31 Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out."

Just prior to the events of this passage, Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead. People were flocking to Jesus because they had heard of this miracle, and many, including Jews, were believing in Him. This upset the religious leaders, and they plotted to kill Lazarus and Jesus. They had tried to capture Jesus before, but each time He escaped because "*his time had not yet come"* (John 7:30).

But in this Gospel reading, we see Jesus acknowledging that the time has come to fulfill His purpose

and glorify His Father. A grain of wheat fulfills its purpose of producing grain when it falls to the earth and dies. Likewise, Jesus must die in order to accomplish His purpose of providing eternal salvation for all who believe. Though His soul was troubled, He would not hold back His life but would give it as a sacrifice for others. Because of His sacrifice we have been offered eternal life. We can love this life with its worldly pleasures and sin or we can turn from this life and follow Him. One is the wide road that leads to destruction, and one is the narrow road that leads to eternal life (St. Matthew 7:13-14).

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. List the primary aspects of the New Covenant and prayerfully thank God for Christ's provision. Jesus came to fulfil the New Covenant that Jeremiah predicted. What aspects of the New Covenant resonate with you and sound like Good News as opposed to the Old Covenant?

2. How does it encourage you to be faithful to Jesus this week knowing that He learned obedience in His life through suffering? In what ways can you see God working through your own suffering? It might be helpful to list one particular issue that keeps coming into your mind. How can you surrender this to God and look beyond these circumstances to see God's sovereign hand?

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/032215-fifth-sunday-lent.cfm

First Reading JER 31:31-34

Second Reading HEB 5:7-9

Gospel Reading JN 12:20-33

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 5-18-2014



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for 5-18-2014. This week we open with a reading from Acts and then return to our study on First Peter. Then we conclude with a Gospel lesson from John 14. As I write this, I am preparing to travel to France with a group of students to experience the culture there for the next two weeks. From there I am visiting an aunt and uncle in Belgium, the uncle that has spent his life researching the Church and as a professor at the American University of Leuven.

The first reading is from Acts 6. Here we see how God put it into the hearts of the disciples to organize the early church by dividing the duties among serving and preaching.

> *1 Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. 2 So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. 3 "Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. 4 "But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." 5 The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. 6 And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them. 7 The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase*

> *greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith. (Acts 6:1-7)*

First, note that Stephan, one of the man who was selected to serve was martyred in the very next chapter because of his powerful speech to the unbelieving Jews. A point that can be observed is although believers may have specific, non-ministry roles all of us are called to give testimony for Jesus. Saint Peter said, in the context of enduring suffering Christian testimony, "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" (1 Peter 3:15). Second, note that the disciples prayed for God's confirmation and blessing upon their decision (v. 6). Prayer is an essential first step when making decisions of any kind, but especially those dealing with the organization and carrying out of God's ministry. Finally, note that "a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith" (v.7). Though many of the Jews rejected Christ, God reached many of the Jewish leaders in order to rapidly build His Church (v. 7, "The word of God kept on spreading"). This conversion led to the priesthood of all believers, a mystery that we will see was revealed in the second reading from today.

Moving onto the second reading, we return to the Book of First Peter. The context of the message is persecution of believers. Here we see the mystery of the priesthood of all believers revealed, through the symbolism of stone building blocks with Jesus as the Chief Cornerstone, the One Whom the builders, aka the Jews, rejected.

> *4 And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, 5 you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 6 For this is contained in Scripture: "BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A CHOICE STONE, A PRECIOUS CORNER stone, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED." 7 This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve, "THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE VERY CORNER stone," 8 and, "A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE"; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed. 9 But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;(1 Peter 2:4-9)*

The main idea from this text is that God is building His Church out of precious building blocks of people, the foremost of whom is Jesus Christ, the "living stone which has been rejected by men" (v. 4). This Church is made up of spiritual stones (believers) all of whom are priests in the eyes of God (v. 9), since the Jewish Levitical priesthood has passed away. Jesus is our High Priest (Hebrews 4:14), the only mediator between us and God (1 Timothy 2:5, the byline of this ministry). Jesus is of the line of Melchizedek (Hebrews 7:17), not the line of Aaron that has passed away. One of the reasons that Stephen was stoned after his appointment in Acts 6 that we read in the first reading was because of his teaching about the passing away of the Old Testament Levitical priesthood. We

can celebrate the fact that Jesus' priesthood will never pass away, and that we join with Him as spiritual priests for His service.

The main theme of the Book of First Peter that was have studied over the past several weeks has been the suffering of believers. The Gospel reading today provides some insights into things that believers can look forward to in order to endure suffering in their daily lives. The Gospel lesson this week is from John Chapter 14. This is one of those sections of Scripture about which we say, "if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that would be written" (John 21:25). This contains some of the richest teaching from Jesus of anywhere in the New Testament. As you read take note of repeated words and phrases which provide indications of the subjects that Jesus emphasized during His message to the disciples in the upper room of the Last Supper just before He went to Calvary.

> *1 "Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. 2 In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. 3 If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also. 4 And you know the way where I am going." 5 Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, how do we know the way?" 6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me. 7 If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him." 8 Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." 9 Jesus said to him, "Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? 10 "Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works. 11 Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me; otherwise believe because of the works themselves. 12 Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do; because I go to the Father." (John 14:1-12)*

This section is unique in that it contained two sets of repeated words and phrases each of which was repeated three times. First, Jesus emphasized His divinity by using the phrase "I am" three times, a phrase that appeared throughout John's Gospel just before Jesus gave himself to the people to be crucified for the sins of the world. The disciples would have recognized this phrase as a strong statement of divinity. Although their eyes were blinded to the reality of the events that Jesus predicted concerning His death and resurrection, they would later remember this event after he rose from the dead. No one used this phrase about himself unless they were God. Second, Jesus repeated the phrase "believe in Me" three times during his final message to His disciples on that last Passover meal with them. As in any Bible study, repeated words provide an insight into the subject that was being emphasized by the Gospel writer under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21). In the case the big idea of the message was that because Jesus is God the world is to believe in Him.

As we said in the introduction, entire collections of books could be written about this section, even

about just a single verse. Let's consider a portion of one verse in detail, something that spoke particularly to us as we studied Jesus' message. Verse 3 provided several powerful insights into not only Jesus' mission and how He served us, and a glimpse into our future with Him.

> *3 If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.*

Jesus said:

> "If." Jesus had the choice to either follow the will of the Father, or to forsake the eventual suffering and just save Himself. Jesus said in Luke, "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done" (Luke 22:42). Jesus chose suffering and death for us. Saint Paul said, "Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:8).
>
> "I go." Nobody else could go to redeem us from our sin, Jesus had to go for us as a substitute, the perfect lamb of God. Saint Peter said, "and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed" (1 Peter 2:24). Jesus said in verse six that He was the only to God for us. "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me."
>
> "to prepare a place." Jesus went to heaven with a mission to prepare a place for us to come to, either when we die or when He comes to gather His church (1 Thessalonians 4:17). Jesus was a carpenter, but the city to which He went to prepare was most likely a heavenly place, the "New Jerusalem" referred to in several places in the Bible including Galatians 4:26, Hebrews 11:10, Hebrews 12:22–24, Hebrews 13:14), but it is most fully described in Revelation 21. John spoke in the Book of Revelation about this glorious place, "And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband" Revelation 21:2)
>
> "for you." Jesus died for us because "all of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). "The penalty for our sins is death" (Romans 6:23a) but because Jesus gave Himself for us "the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23b). We can't do anything to earn it. Paul said, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).
>
> "I will come again." Jesus is going to come again. First, He will come to gather His church, first the saints that have already died, and then those that remain. Second, Jesus will return to pass judgment upon entire earth. Paul said about this first event:
>
> *"14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. 15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen*

> *asleep. 16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord "(1 Thessalonians 4:14-17)*
>
> John said about this second event:
>
> *"11 And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war. 12 His eyes are a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems; and He has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself. 13 He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. 14 And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses. 15 From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty" (Revelation 19:11-15).*
>
> As believers in the risen Jesus Christ our Lord, we can be comforted by the fact that we are in the first group. We are of those who will be met by Jesus when we die (John 14:3), or are taken by Him (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

As we conclude the study for the Mass this week, let's focus upon something that Jesus said in the Gospel. Our Lord said, "I will come again and receive you to Myself" (John 14:3). The first Person that we see after we die will be Jesus Christ Himself! What a comfort this can be to us as we journey through difficult days "topside," as I like to say.

Have a great week.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. People around us, even those that go to church, have many different beliefs about how people get to God when they die. Some believe that they must be a good person, follow the Golden Rule (Matthew 7:12), and be something like at least 51 percent good and no more than 49 percent bad. What did Jesus say was the only true way to come to God? Using what you learned today, write a paragraph about how you would lovingly explain to someone holding a false belief about how to make it to heaven.

2. You read a verse in Revelation 21 about the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:2). That chapter contains many comforting verses to believers in Jesus regarding the place Jesus is preparing for us and the way in which God will comfort us after our trials here on earth. Read that entire chapter of Revelation and answer the following question.

> How did the study of Revelation 21 provide you with a blessing as promised by God in Revelation 1:3, "blessed are those who read this Book"?

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Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass visit this web site: http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/051814.cfm

First Reading ACTS 6:1-7

Acts 6:1-7 NAS95 1 Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. 2 So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. 3 "Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. 4 "But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." 5 The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. 6 And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them. 7 The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.

Second Reading 1 PT 2:4-9

1 Peter 2:4-9 NAS95 4 And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, 5 you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 6 For this is contained in Scripture: "BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A CHOICE STONE, A PRECIOUS CORNER stone, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED." 7 This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve, "THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE VERY CORNER stone," 8 and, "A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE"; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed. 9 But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

Gospel Reading JN 14:1-12

John 14:1-12 NAS95 1 "Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. 2 "In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. 3 "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also. 4 "And you know the way where I am going." 5 Thomas *said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, how do we know the way?" 6 Jesus *said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me. 7 "If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him." 8 Philip *said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." 9 Jesus *said to him, "Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? 10 "Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works. 11 "Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me; otherwise believe because of the works themselves. 12 "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in

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Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do; because I go to the Father.

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Mass Study Notes for Sunday 5-11-2014



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass study notes for 5-11-2014. This week we open with the first reading from Peter's speech on the Day of Pentecost when God sent the Holy Spirit to the rapidly growing Church. Then we move to the second reading and continue our study in the Book of First Peter. Finally, we close with the Gospel lesson from the tenth chapter of the Gospel of Saint John.

The first reading is from Chapter 2 of the Book of Acts. The context is Peter's speech to a crowd of about 120 followers of Christ (Acts 1:15) on the Day of Pentecost, 50 days after that first Easter Sunday. Just before Peter's speech, God poured out His Holy Spirit upon the followers which empowered them to speak in many known languages. Since this was unusual, some in the crowd that were gathered for the feast accused them of being drunk (Acts 2:13). In response to this allegation, Peter addressed the crowd to explain the reason for this unusual occurrence. Today's reading then jumps to verse 36 because these intermediate verses were covered last week. The opening word in

verse 36 is the adverb "therefore." Without considering the context of the intermediate verses, a significant amount of information is left out that is relevant to this last section. Since we always need to understand what the "therefore" is there for, we will summarize the important points from the intermediate verses (15 – 35). First, read the opening of Peter's address in verse 14.

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

Peter said in other words, "listen up." Next, he immediately corrected some of the people's false assumptions that the followers of Christ were drunk (v. 15). He said that what was happening was the fulfillment of the Prophet Joel's message (v.16) regarding God's pouring out of His Spirit on all mankind in the end times (Joel 2:28 – 32). In retrospect, we understand that what Peter meant was that this was a partial fulfillment of Joel's prophecy. After Peter quoted from this section of Joel, he presented testimony about how the people crucified "Jesus the Nazarene" and God raised Him from the dead (vv. 22 – 24). Next, Peter quoted from the Psalms to show how Jesus also fulfilled those prophetic writings by King David (vv.25 – 28). He noted that David died and his tomb is "with us to this day" (v.29), but Jesus fulfilled the prophecy that Someone would sit on David's throne (vv. 30 – 31). Saint Matthew went to great lengths to show that Jesus was of the line of David (Matthew 1:1-17). Additionally, the Prophet Isaiah stated explicitly that the Messiah would be of the line of David (Isaiah 9:6-7). Next Peter said, "This Jesus, God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses. Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear" (vv. 32-33). Peter closed this section of his address by again quoting from a Psalm, this time one that contained a conversation between God the Father and God the Son. "THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, 'SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I MAKE YOUR ENEMIES A FOOTSTOOL FOR YOUR FEET'" (vv. 34a – 35). To summarize, the sending of the Holy Spirit was a partial fulfillment of Joel's prophecy that signaled the start of the end times, after the Messiah came. Second, Jesus fulfilled the prophecies that He would be of the line of David. Finally, in the future Jesus the Lord will overcome all of His enemies, and be exalted above all of creation (1 Corinthians 15:27).

Now let's proceed with the reading.

> *36 "Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ–this Jesus whom you crucified." 37 Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" 38 Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 "For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself." 40 And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation!" 41 So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls. (Acts 2:14, 36-41)*

To paraphrase, Pete said some something like, "Therefore," take into account the authority of the prophetic Scriptures from which I previously quoted and how Jesus perfectly fulfilled them. God made Jesus both the Supreme Master ("Lord") and Messiah ("Christ," or "Anointed One," meaning Deliverer) (v. 36).

Peter's speech had a profound impact upon the crowd. "Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart" and then asked Peter what they should do (v. 37). Peter told them to repent and be baptized, and then they too would receive the Holy Spirit (v. 38). Why do you think this happened, why were they "pierced to the heart"? Did Peter's speech have a profound impact upon **you** after you read it?

Here are some insights into possible reasons why Peter's speech had such a profound impact upon the Jewish audience who were gathered in Jerusalem for the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost). First, the Jews were "people of the Book." These were the ones to whom God first revealed His plan of salvation. God, through His sovereign plan, had gathered the Jews together in Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Weeks to coincide with His outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the group of 120 followers of Jesus. To the Jews, the authority of God was vested in the Holy Books, the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. Once Peter explained with compelling evidence that Jesus was the fulfillment of the Holy Books, the Jews evidently recognized the overwhelming evidence in support of Jesus as God's Promised Messiah. A second possible reason why Peter's speech had a profound impact upon the Jews gathered for the Feast was the sheer magnanimity of what happened after the Holy Spirit of God had settled upon the group of believers. "And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance. And when this sound occurred, the crowd came together, and were bewildered because each one of them was hearing them speak in his own language" (Acts 2:4, 6). Imagine the scene. Pilgrims from the various language groups all around the Roman Empire were gathered in Jerusalem for the Feast of Weeks. Next, the pilgrims heard this group of Galileans speaking, but each one of them heard and understood in their own language! This great miracle would have had a profound impact upon the people.

Because of this cascading series of events the pilgrims who heard Peter's message were convicted of their sin, they were "pierced to the heart" (v.37). A total of 3,000 Jews who heard Peter's speech repented and were baptized in one day.

We cannot underestimate the power that God unveiled that day in Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit of God is the Person of God that lives inside of us, the One that empowers the Church. He is the Power (Dunamis in Greek, similar to Dynamite in English) spoken of Jesus when He said that "the disciples would receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you" (Acts 1:8). He is the One who started the Church that day in Jerusalem. He is God With Us, living in us, the Immanuel of Christ Whom God said "would never leave us nor forsake us (Deuteronomy 31:6), the One that Jesus said would be in us (John 14:17).

As we leave the first reading and the events of that magical day in Jerusalem, let us endeavor to

focus upon how God the Holy Spirit empowers and emboldens **us** to accomplish God's work in our lives. Let's also recognize how the Holy Spirit worked through Peter as he testified about how Jesus suffered and died for our sins, which will be revealed in the next reading.

The second reading is another portion of Peter's experience of Jesus. Let's see how Peter used the authority of the Old Testament to affirm his argument about how Jesus Christ suffered as a perfect Man for us.

> *20 For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God. 21 For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, 22 WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; 23 and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; 24 and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. 25 For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls. (1 Peter 2:20-25)*

The people were struggling with various forms of persecution for their faith, as well as finding their identity in Jesus Christ. They may have asked something like, "Why, if I am a Christian, do I have to suffer persecution, when all I have done is to believe the truth of God and follow His commandments?" The answer, according to the Holy Spirit, as recorded by Peter, is that we as believers are called by God to suffer (v.21) with Jesus as our example on how we are to go about it. "[W]hile being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously" (v.23). Peter said that Jesus died for our sins, "so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed" (v. 24). It was through Jesus death on the cross that He freed us from the power of sin (Romans 8:2). We suffer for a wide variety of reasons, one of which is to accomplish the purposes of God (v.20d).

Have you developed your own personal "theology of suffering?" Have you rationalized, in light of the Scriptures, why bad things happen to "good" (Romans 3:23) people? These are good things to wrestle with even before hard times fall upon us. One way that suffering benefits us is that it helps us to identify ourselves with Christ Who suffered for us. There is a fellowship or bond that comes from suffering with someone. God invites us into a bond with Christ as we go through hard times and persecution.

I became friends with a man named Ron Christy several years ago just before he was diagnosed with ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease). Ron provided a powerful story about how a Christian can suffer while still providing a strong testimony for the Lord. You can read Ron's testimony online at the following link: http://www.christiansforchrist.org/articles/testimonies/ron-christy-my-walk-of-faith-with-als

Peter's words about returning to the "Shepherd and Guardian of our souls" sets the perfect stage for

the Gospel lesson from John Chapter 10. The context of His message is just after He healed a blind man and afterwards confronted the Pharisees (John 9). This section of Scripture is profound in that throughout the Chapter Jesus uses a metaphor of Himself as the Shepherd and the Door, with us as the sheep. Other characters come into play in the lesson including a gatekeeper, robbers, thieves, and strangers. As you read, think about the contemporary application of these characters as Jesus' illustration unfolds. In the world today, who are the robbers, thieves, and strangers to whom Jesus was pointing?

> *1 "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbs up some other way, he is a thief and a robber. 2 But he who enters by the door is a shepherd of the sheep. 3 To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 When he puts forth all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. 5 A stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers." 6 This figure of speech Jesus spoke to them, but they did not understand what those things were which He had been saying to them. 7 So Jesus said to them again, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. 8 All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. 9 I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." (John 10:1-10)*

Jesus' story alluded to Ezekiel 34, where God condemned the shepherds of Israel, meaning the spiritual leaders (Ezekiel 34:1-10). Ezekiel announced God's strong judgment on the kings, priests, and prophets who ruled before the exile of the Jews to Babylon. God said, "Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will demand My sheep from them and make them cease from feeding sheep. So the shepherds will not feed themselves anymore, but I will deliver My flock from their mouth, so that they will not be food for them" (Ezekiel 34:10). It's not coincidental that Jesus' message came just after He told a group of Pharisees that they were spiritually blind (John 9:41). It's evident that Jesus message was pointed squarely at the Pharisees, a group of spiritual "lay ministers" (shepherds) of Israel.

A wealth of rich points can be drawn from the reading. First, notice how as the story unfolded that Jesus was the Shepherd (v. 2), then in verse 7 he became the "door of the sheep" which led to the pasture (v. 9d). In the first century, the shepherds sometimes slept in the gate in order to protect their sheep. Anyone or anything that wanted to come into the sheepfold would have to enter through the gate and thereby come past the shepherd. By application, Jesus is saying that the only way to God is through Him. Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6). Faith in Jesus is the only means provided by God for a person to cross into Jesus' fold and be saved (v. 9).

Second, if you have ever visited the areas around Jerusalem you will notice that the shepherds in the region stand at various positions around the sheepfold and summon the animals with their own unique calls. The application of this principle is that Jesus calls His people to God's Kingdom. Jesus

went even further than a communal call to His sheep, He said, "he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out" (v. 3c). Jesus knows each one of us, his precious sheep. Later, beyond the range of today's reading, Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me" (John 10:14). This means that Jesus desires a personal relationship with each of us.

Third, notice Jesus' "I am" statement in verse 7, which is the third of this type of statement in John's Gospel (in the English translation, in the Greek text this is the 13'th). This phrase was something that the First Century Jews would have recognized as a strong statement of divinity. In Jesus' earlier use of this phrase in John's Gospel He said, "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35), and "I am the light of the world" (John 8:35). In today's reading Jesus said, "I am the door" (v. 9a). Jesus is our source of life, our spiritual sustenance. He is the Light of truth from God, the Light that leads us to the single door to obtain eternal life, the only way to God.

Fourth, Jesus is our protector from the spiritual thieves, strangers, and wild animals. Though Jesus directed His message to the Pharisees, these ungodly forces are alive and well in the present day. All one has to do is click through the television dial on any given day to find spiritual charlatans peddling their wares all across the airwaves. False spiritual cults abound, as do global religious movements that enthrone the false god of the moon and objects in temples. Peter said about the false teachers, "But these, like unreasoning animals, born as creatures of instinct to be captured and killed, reviling where they have no knowledge, will in the destruction of those creatures also be destroyed" (2 Peter 2:12). Though we live in a fallen age where spiritual darkness is present across the world, we are called as the ones that God knows by name to continue to plead with the lost and dying generation to repent of their sins and be baptized, trusting only in the Lord Jesus for spiritual life.

Some months back I completed a study of the Book of Genesis and made an interesting observation about God's gathering of the animals into the ark. The Bible says, "So they went into the ark to Noah, by twos of all flesh in which was the breath of life" (Genesis 7:15). The insight that I had was that many of the people in that region that had either watched, or possibly even been involved in the building of the ark, had to have seen the animals entering two by two into the ark. Perhaps the people on the outside were saying something like, "There they go, two by two into the ark, just like Preacher Noah had said they would." Noah, a preacher of righteousness (2 Peter 2:5) must have suffered terribly knowing all the people that he ministered to perished, except for his small family. The story went on, "Those that entered, male and female of all flesh, entered as God had commanded him; and the LORD closed it behind him" (v. 16). In retrospect, it was easy for them to be convinced of Noah's prophecy regarding the Great Flood once the door of the ark was sealed shut by God and the deluge began. Noah would have allowed anyone entrance to the ark, right up until the time the flood began. Instead of just eight people being saved (1 Peter 3:20), the Scripture could have read something like this:

"On the very same day Noah and Shem and Ham and Japheth, the sons of Noah, and Noah's

> *wife and the three wives of his sons with them, entered the ark" (Genesis 7:13).*
>
> Then, as just before God sealed the door of the ark shut, a man named John came running up the ramp into the ark.
>
> *"[W]hen the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water" (1 Peter 3:20).*
>
> And a man named John.

The animals are walking two by two into the proverbial ark right now. God is gathering His people through their faith in the Jesus, who was foreshadowed in the ark. In the Gospel lesson today, Jesus gathered and called His people by name into the pen where He protected them and fed them. Jesus is the ark, He is our only means of escaping the flood of judgment that will come upon the unsaved world because of their sin. Someday God will once again seal up the "ark," forbidding anyone else to cross from death into life. In the parable of the ten virgins Jesus said, "And while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut" (Matthew 25:10). John said in Revelation, "But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." (Revelation 21:8).

Our first response is to make sure that we have put our trust in Jesus for salvation. Have you resolve this in your own heart, that when you give an account for your life you can honestly say you trusted in Jesus, not your own good works? Our next response is to warn the world of the coming judgment and point them to the only possible means of salvation, repentance of their sin and faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20). Amen.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. What does it look like in your life to shine your light in a dark world to those "outside the ark"? What is one concrete step that you could begin praying about and take in the upcoming weeks to reach one person for Jesus?

2. Although we asked you to identify the contemporary roles of the various bad actors in the Gospel lesson the focus wasn't upon the evil actors but upon Jesus as the only means to reach God. In light of what you learned, what, or who, are the evil actors that are influencing your life in terms of walking with God, and how does Jesus protect and deliver you from them?

3. Jesus is referred to as our Good Shepherd and the Guardian of our soul. In what areas are you struggling on your own and need to let Him into your life to shepherd you? How does this

guardianship of your soul change how you view life and your decisions?

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/051114.cfm

First Reading ACTS 2:14A, 36-41 (plus skipped verses)

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

Acts 2:36-41 NAS95 36 "Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ–this Jesus whom you crucified." 37 Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" 38 Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 "For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself." 40 And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation!" 41 So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.

Second Reading 1 PT 2:20B-25

1 Peter 2:20-25 NAS95 20 For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God. 21 For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, 22 WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; 23 and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; 24 and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. 25 For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.

Gospel Reading JN 10:1-10

John 10:1-10 NAS95 1 "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbs up some other way, he is a thief and a robber. 2 "But he who enters by the door is a shepherd of the sheep. 3 "To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 "When he puts forth all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. 5 "A stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers." 6 This figure of speech Jesus spoke to them, but they did not understand what those things were which He had been saying to them. 7 So Jesus said to them again, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. 8 "All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. 9 "I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. 10 "The

thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

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



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

This Book was written about a man that God allowed to be afflicted by Satan. It is one of the earliest Books in the Old Testament with most scholars agreeing that the events in the book date to the era of the Patriarchs. This battle between God's man, Job, and the enemy of God, Satan, happened outside of Job's knowledge or understanding. Through it all Job lost his ten children, most of his

possessions, and then finally his health. Though Job was the victim of Satan's attack, in the end God restored many of the things that Job had lost. However, through it all Job held steadfastly to his faith in God and the belief that there was abundant life beyond this physical world.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Second, The Sadducees were an interesting bunch of legalistic Jewish believers who held the

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

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

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

game over!

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

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

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

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

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

In this we see that Paul experienced suffering and prayed for the Thessalonian believers to be comforted in their affliction. I t is important to note that a biblical perspective never assumes that Christians will not suffer. The difference is that we have hope beyond this world, as Paul says, "eternal comfort" (v.16). It is God's love that provides comfort, hope and strength to keep walking in the good works that He has prepared in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:10). Instead of being

sidetracked by suffering and opposition, Paul asked his fellow believers to pray for them that God would cause His Word to spread and be honored among the people who have not yet heard. Paul recognized the reality of suffering, but did not see the situation as hopeless. He turned to God for help and hope.

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

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

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

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

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

For Further Study

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

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

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

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Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass visit this web site: http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/111013.cfm Thirty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading

2 MC 7:1-2, 9-14

Second Reading

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

Gospel Reading

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

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