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

Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 2-14-2016



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

Introduction to the First Reading:

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

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

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

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

First Reading:

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

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

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

himself.

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

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

Introduction to the Second Reading:

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

Second Reading:

Romans 10:8-13 NAS95 8 But what does it say? "THE WORD IS NEAR YOU, in your mouth and in your heart" –that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, 9 that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; 10 for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. 11 For the Scripture says, "WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED." 12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; 13 for "WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED."

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

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

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

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

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

Returning to the reading, Saint Paul described how a person must receive the free gift of eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ. He said, "if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. 11 For the Scripture says, "WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED" (Romans 10:9-11). Paul quoted from Deuteronomy in verse 8, which was part of Moses' message to the Israelites before they entered the Promised Land. He explained to them how the words of the Law were in the midst of them because it had been explained to them in detail. They couldn't deny that they knew it when God punished them for breaking it. Finally, Paul quoted from the Prophet Joel a universal message from God, "Whoever will call upon the name of the LORD will be saved" (v. 13).

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

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

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

Gospel Reading:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

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

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

Readings for the Week

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Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 10-18-2015

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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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Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Mass Study Notes for Sunday 2-22-2015



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for 2-22-2015. This week we open with the first reading from the Book of Genesis in which we study the covenant that God made with Noah when he landed in the ark after the Great Flood. Then we move to the second reading from the Book of First Peter where we learn of the fate of those that were swept away in the Flood as well as the means by which God provides believers with safety through His ark of salvation in Jesus. We also study what the Bible teaches about baptism. Finally, we conclude with the Gospel lesson from Mark in which we see Jesus' temptation in the wilderness and the beginning of His earthly reign that brought the kingdom of heaven down to earth.

The first reading is from the Book of Genesis and provides the backdrop to the origin of the rainbows. The context of this passage is just after Noah and his family, eight people in total, landed in the ark at the conclusion of the Great Flood. This followed a 120 year period during which Noah both built the ark and at the same time ministered to the people that ended up perishing on the earth. After the Flood, God blessed Noah telling him to "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth" (Genesis 9:1). At this point, God changed the human diet to allow the eating of animals and established capital punishment (Genesis 9:3-6). It was no wonder that God placed fear of humans in the minds of the animals (v. 2). Today's reading outlines what is known as the "Noahic Covenant."

8 Then God spoke to Noah and to his sons with him, saying, 9 "Now behold, I Myself do establish My covenant with you, and with your descendants after you; 10 and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you; of all that comes out of the ark, even every beast of the earth. 11 "I establish My covenant with you; and all flesh shall never again be cut off by the water of the flood, neither shall there again be a flood to destroy the earth." 12 God said, "This is the sign of the covenant which I am making between Me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all successive generations; 13 I set My bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a sign of a covenant between Me and the earth. 14 "It shall come about, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow will be seen in the cloud, 15 and I will remember My covenant, which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and never again shall the water become a flood to destroy all flesh. (Genesis 9:8-15 NAS95)

The unconditional promise that God made to Noah was that the earth would never again be destroyed by a global flood (v. 11). This "Noahic Covenant" is unconditional because it is not predicated upon Noah, his family, or anyone born afterwards to perform some duty. God's promise was confirmed by His giving of the sign of the rainbow, something that evidently did not exist before the Great Flood. In our day when we see the rainbow we can remember God's grace and faithfulness. God was faithful in accomplishing His promise to Noah in rescuing those that trusted in His ark. God showed His tremendous grace because He didn't altogether destroy the earth because "Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord" (Genesis 6:8). God provided the "ark of salvation" to all of those who believed. Had anyone else other than those eight people acted in faith and stepped onto the ark, they too would have been saved from the flood of God's wrath that was poured out upon the earth. In the same way, Jesus is the "ark of salvation" for all those who believe, which is what we will discuss in the next reading. In the case of Noah's family, it was both the physical ark and their belief in it that saved them. They had to believe a global flood was coming, build the ark, and enter into it before the flood began. It is interesting to note that Noah's ark is a type of Christ that prefigured the coming of Jesus (the antitype). A "type" is a theological term for people, statements, or events prefiguring or superseded by antitypes. The Bible clearly teaches that Jesus is the only "ark of salvation." When we trust in Jesus we ourselves enter the ark by faith and by God's grace (Ephesians 2:8-9). Like the ark that only had one door, Jesus is the only door to heaven (John 10:9).

The second reading is from the Book of First Peter. The reading follows Saint Peter's teaching on the characteristics desirable in a Christian including being "harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit" (1 Peter 3:8). This was in order to bring others to faith in Jesus

even during times of spiritual persecution, and calling believers to provide a defense to the antagonists of the hope that we have in God (1 Peter 3:15).

18 For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; 19 in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison, 20 who once were disobedient, when 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. 21 Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you–not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience–through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22 who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him. (1 Peter 3:18-22 NAS95)

Peter explained that Jesus died **once** for our sins, which is a sacrifice that can never be repeated (v. 18, Hebrews 9:28). God used Noah as a "minister of righteousness" (2 Peter 2:5) to preach to the people during his generation over the 120 years it took for him to build the ark (Genesis 6:3). Jesus' Gospel message was proclaimed through Noah during his days on earth "to the spirits now in prison" (v. 19), meaning Hell. This does not mean that Jesus went to Hell and preached to the dead spirits in order to give them a second chance. The Bible is clear that it is appointed for man once to die and then to face judgment (Heb. 9:27). Everyone that did not believe that they needed to be saved ended up in this terrible eternal prison. Except for Noah, his wife, his three sons and their three wives, the entire population of earth was destroyed.

The apostle Peter is saying in this passage that salvation comes through faith in God's provision. Just like the ark was God's provision in the time of Noah, God has made the ultimate provision for our sins in the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus. He is the one and only "ark of salvation." He is not saying that baptism saves you, he is making a correlation between the ark's ability to save Noah and his family and Jesus' ability to save anyone who comes to Him in faith ("an appeal to God for a good conscience" v. 21). Peter equated baptism with faith, and he explained that the "baptism" which does save us is our faith that we have in the Lord Jesus who is above all authorities and powers (v. 22b). The text uses the term "corresponding" (Greek "antitupos") in the first word of verse 21. Water baptism is the counterpart (corresponds) to the salvation that we as believers possess through faith in Jesus Christ and God's grace alone (Ephesians 2:8-9). During the time of Saint Peter, a person who expressed faith in the Lord Jesus obediently submitted to baptism (Acts 2:38). We can be joyful that God has provided Jesus as our "ark of salvation" in which we can enter through the means of faith alone (Ephesians 2:8-9). Although we are members of the church universal, the church doesn't save us, Jesus does.

Before we conclude the study of the second reading, it is necessary for us to study the meaning of baptism. What does the Bible teach about baptism? The following information is not meant to disparage any particular church's teaching on the subject, but to provide the biblical foundation from which the church practice evolved.

The word translated "baptism" from the original is "baptizo" which means to immerse or submerge. The practice of baptism is very Jewish in that the Jews were familiar with ceremonial cleansings in a bath known as the "mikvah." It was in such a mikvah in which Bathsheba was cleansing after her time of the month when King David spied upon her. A popular myth is that Baptism was also a means in the Old Testament of confirming the reception of a Jewish Proselyte, although this practice is found nowhere in the Bible. Nobody in the Bible was ever baptized into the Jewish community. This came about only through the prescriptions of the Law, and especially by circumcision (Exodus 12:48-49). The Jewish practices of ritual cleansing are, however, mentioned as an elementary doctrine by the author of Hebrews (Hebrews 6:2), one that is emblematic of the purity in which God requires of worshippers. We know from the Bible that a ritual cleansing of the body in a mikvah or any other type of bath, be it sprinkling, immersion, or pouring, cannot remove the **spiritual** dirt from anyone (1 Peter 3:21). The Scripture says that only God can forgive sin (Mark 2:7, Ephesians 2:8-9, and especially Luke 5:23-24).

John the Baptist initiated the practice of baptism, although his was a baptism of repentance. Saint Mark said, "John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Mark 1:4). This "baptism of repentance" signified the participant's testimony of their personal repentance of their sin, meaning they had a change of mind and agreed with God that they had sinned and they desired to follow a new direction in their lives. In the case of John's baptism, we see the believer's response to their need of repentance is to immediately submit to immersion in water as a public, outward expression of the inward change they had experienced in their hearts after hearing John's preaching. Jesus took over where John the Baptist left off and continued this baptism of repentance. It wasn't until the Book of Acts that we find the disciples teaching a different kind of water baptism.

In order to understand the transition brought about in the practice of baptism in the Book of Acts, we must first understand that this Book is itself one of transitions. The first transition was that of Jesus to heaven when he left His disciples in charge of continuing His ministry. As the disciples were all gathered with Jesus they watched Him ascend into the clouds with the promise to "come again in like manner" (Acts 1:11). The next big transition was when the disciples gathered to await the promised Holy Spirit on Pentecost. On that day they received a baptism of a different type, the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Finally, we see an interesting exchange that occurred between Paul and a group of disciples in Ephesus:

Acts 19:1-5 NAS95 1 It happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus, and found some disciples. 2 He said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said to him, "No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit." 3 And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" And they said, "Into John's baptism." 4 Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus." 5 When they heard this, they were baptized ***in the name of the Lord Jesus*** *(emphasis added).*

John's baptism was qualitatively different as it was a baptism of repentance; whereas the baptism

performed in the Book of Acts and hereafter is 1) a baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus (v. 5), 2) tied to the personal reception of the Holy Spirit, and 3) still contains the element of repentance, but also includes the recognition of Christ's resurrection power in living the Christian life. These elements are all tied together, creating a complex conglomeration of multiple dimensions of saving faith: repentance, believing in Jesus Christ, and receiving of the Holy Spirit from God. We find this in the Second Chapter of Acts during Peter's address to a large group of devout Jews in Jerusalem (Acts 2:5) on the Day of Pentecost:

Acts 2:37-41 NAS95 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.

Here we see the instantaneous response of the people who repented of their sin, believed in Jesus "for the forgiveness of their sin" (v. 38b), received the Holy Spirit (v. 38c), and submitted to immersion as a public profession of their newfound belief. Baptism was for them a means of identifying with the death of Jesus by immersing themselves in the water, and then rising to a newness of life upon coming out. This ceremonial practice would have knit well with their previous Jewish religious practices. Baptism is Jewish, it was given to us by the Jew John the Baptist, practiced by Jewish Jesus, brought into its final form by Jewish Peter, and immortalized by the Pharisaical Jew, Paul.

Another case in Acts is descriptive of the later application of these same proscriptive principles:

*Acts 8:26-40 NAS95 26 But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, "Get up and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a desert road.) 27 So he got up and went; and there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure; and he had come to Jerusalem to worship, 28 and he was returning and sitting in his chariot, and was reading the prophet Isaiah. 29 Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go up and join this chariot." 30 Philip ran up and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?" 31 And he said, "Well, how could I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. 32 Now the passage of Scripture which he was reading was this: "HE WAS LED AS A SHEEP TO SLAUGHTER; AND AS A LAMB BEFORE ITS SHEARER IS SILENT, SO HE DOES NOT OPEN HIS MOUTH. 33 "IN HUMILIATION HIS JUDGMENT WAS TAKEN AWAY; WHO WILL RELATE HIS GENERATION? FOR HIS LIFE IS REMOVED FROM THE EARTH." 34 The eunuch answered Philip and said, "Please tell me, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself or of someone else?" 35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him. 36 As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch *said, "Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?" 37*

And Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." 38 And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him. 39 When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch no longer saw him, but went on his way rejoicing. 40 But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he kept preaching the gospel to all the cities until he came to Caesarea.

In the story of Philip and the Jewish Ethiopian "eunuch" (one who voluntarily submitted to castration for the purpose of serving among a king's harem), we see the progression of events as they played out in the life of this royal official who was returning from Jerusalem where he had been worshiping.

1. The man read the Word of God,
2. He understood the Word of God and believed it (Philip was obedient to the Holy Spirit in answering the call to explain it to him),
3. He publically expressed his faith (to Philip),
4. He was obedient and submitted to baptism by immersion as soon as it was practically possible.

When we as believers are obedient to what God says about the need to be baptized we publically identify with Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection from the dead. One commentator put it this way. "Immersion = Death. Submersion = Burial (the ratification of death). Emergence = Resurrection." Saint Paul said:

4 Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection (Romans 6:4-5 NAS95)

This is the conclusion on what the Bible teaches about baptism of Christian believers. Regardless of how the doctrine of baptism has evolved among churches, the biblical teaching is straightforward as to both the meaning and the method of baptism as practiced in the early church.

The Gospel reading is from Saint Mark a few verses before that which we studied last week. This passage records Jesus' forty days of temptation in the wilderness (also found in Matthew 4:2). It is important to note that Jesus' temptation was all part of an ongoing story in the book of Mark that began with Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist and followed by Jesus starting His earthly ministry. Each of these components should be seen as Jesus' credentials for verifying His claim to be the Son of God (Mark 1:1).

12 Immediately the Spirit impelled Him to go out into the wilderness. 13 And He was in the wilderness forty days being tempted by Satan; and He was with the wild beasts, and the angels were ministering to Him. 14 Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, 15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." (Mark 1:12-15 NAS95)

Immediately after Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist, Jesus was compelled by God the Holy Spirit to go to the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. Although God knew that Jesus would successfully endure this trial of 40 days without food and in constant temptation by Satan, Jesus still had to complete the test in order to show to the world both His victory over temptation as well as his triumph over His human condition. Who can imagine going without food for 40 days in the desert? Saint Paul said the following about Jesus:

Philippians 2:6-8 NAS95 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. 8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Jesus voluntarily emptied Himself of the independent use of His divine attributes. Although he was fully God, He was also fully human, and as such was subject to temptations that only a human can experience. Where the first Adam failed, we find in this passage that Jesus (the last Adam 1 Cor. 15:45) resisted the deceptive lies of the Enemy. This is all part of the testimony that Mark is gathering to persuade his audience that Jesus is worthy of our worship as God's Servant to bring the good news that salvation is accessible (at hand).

Undoubtedly Jesus' temptation went far beyond anything that any of us will ever experience. However, we can have hope that in light of Jesus' example, we too can persist in our temptations. Saint Paul said, "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Finally, Jesus' successful completion of the 40 days of temptation brought about the beginning of His earthly ministry and the unveiling of the "kingdom of God" (v. 15). By this time, John the Baptist had been arrested and Jesus took over his message to repent and believe in the Good News (v. 15).

What does this week's study mean for us today? God calls us to identify with Reverend Noah's message of faith and a call to action the same way He calls us to faith and action in our times. Jesus took over where Noah left off and called for people to examine their hearts by repenting of their sin and trusting in His once for all sacrifice to take their transgressions away forever. As believers, we are vastly different from the "spirits in prison" who didn't believe in Noah's message and therefore perished in the Great Flood. Every time that we see a rainbow, whether it is in the sky or in the colors of a peacock, we can remember God's grace and faithfulness in granting us salvation through faith in Jesus Christ alone and not because of any of our good works. God has provided us with the power to resist temptation. We have Jesus' example that a person can resist through trusting in God's dynamic power, the Holy Spirit who lives inside of those who believe.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. Although it's not directly stated in the Bible, I have always maintained that Noah hired workers to build the ark during this 120 year construction project. Additionally, I think that Noah ministered to

the people during this time, both in the building of the ark and in ways in which are not told in the Bible. In what ways are you a "preacher of righteousness" in the various contexts in which God has placed you (work, home, school, etc.)?

2. How does Jesus' fulfillment of all righteousness (even in resisting temptation) give you hope in the midst of your own journey? List one particular area in which you have recently been tempted. In what ways can you identify with Jesus' temptation in the wilderness? How does the application of 1 Corinthians 10:13 empower you to resist?

"No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

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/022215.cfm

First Reading GN 9:8-15

Second Reading 1 PT 3:18-22

Gospel Reading MK 1:12-15

Source(s):

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

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB