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 Lectionary 97: 06/28/2026



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week, we'll talk a little bit about the cost of being a disciple of Jesus. We will see how God empowers us by resting in His omnipotent power and by providing us with reminders of His marvelous grace as we look back to our baptism.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The context of the reading is more strange and mysterious goings on of Elijah's replacement, Elisha. Today's reading is just after Elisha's miraculous replenishment of the widow's oil (2 Kings 4:1 – 7). In the reading, we see yet another of Elijah's great miracles, the birth of a child to a childless Shunammite woman whose husband was very old. This was in repayment to her for the many kindnesses that she had done for him (2 Kings 4:1 – 13). We know from the text that follows that this miracle child would later die and be miraculously resurrected through another miracle (2 Kings 4:32 – 35).

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

First Reading:

> *2 Kings 4:8-11 NAS95 8 Now there came a day when Elisha passed over to Shunem, where there was a prominent woman, and she persuaded him to eat food. And so it was, as often as he passed by, he turned in there to eat food. 9 She said to her husband, "Behold now, I perceive that this is a holy man of God passing by us continually. 10 "Please, let us make a little walled upper chamber and let us set a bed for him there, and a table and a chair and a lampstand; and it shall be, when he comes to us, that he can turn in there." 11 One day he came there and turned in to the upper chamber and rested.*

> *2 Kings 4:14-16 NAS95 14 So he said, "What then is to be done for her?" And Gehazi answered, "Truly she has no son and her husband is old." 15 He said, "Call her." When he had called her, she stood in the doorway. 16 Then he said, "At this season next year you will embrace a son." And she said, "No, my lord, O man of God, do not lie to your maidservant." Omitted: 2Ki 4:17 The woman conceived and bore a son at that season the next year, as Elisha had said to her.*

Gehazi was Elisha's attendant, although his motives may not have been entirely pure towards the Shunammite woman, and he pointed out to Elijah her desire for a son. Perhaps Gehazi thought that he would supplant the woman's elderly husband. Instead, God brought about a miracle reminiscent of the birth of Isaac to Abraham.

The big idea here is that God is a God of miracles. God sees the larger picture and fills people's needs, even without their asking. Although God desires that we ask to meet our needs (James 4:2), He is able to go above and beyond to provide even the things we don't ask for because we think they are too big for God to provide. This helps us endure times of persecution and suffering. We can be thankful to God for giving us these vivid reminders through the scriptural writings of those believers who went before us.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The context of the reading from Romans is Paul's teaching on a believer's unity with God through Christ.

Second Reading:

> *Romans 6:3-4 NAS95 3 Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? 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.*
> *Omitted: Romans 6:5-7 NAS95 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, 6 knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; 7 for he who has died is freed from sin.*
> *Romans 6:8-11 NAS95 8 Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, 9 knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. 10 For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. 11 Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.*

In the reading, we learn much about the Christian life. We identify with Christ through our water baptism (v. 3). We see a contrast between the old self (v. 6), and our new self who is no longer a slave to sin (v. 6b). This fundamental transformation is brought about through the conversion of our soul. Our dead soul was symbolically buried with Christ at our baptism (v. 3), while our new self came to life when we became united to Christ through faith (v. 8, Ephesians 2:8-9). The big idea is that as believers, we are united with Jesus. Our lost souls were united in Jesus' death for us. Then we were united with Jesus and given a new soul through His resurrection from the dead. These truths are vividly expressed through the act of water baptism, which symbolizes a believer's death to the world and resurrection to the newness of life through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Understanding our identity in Christ and holding to it helps us persist during times of persecution for our faith. As we move to the Gospel reading, we will learn more about the promised persecution of believers in Jesus. We can hold onto God's promises and remember that He is a God of miracles even while facing challenges brought about by our faith.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The context of the reading from Matthew is Jesus' private message to the twelve disciples named individually by name (Matthew 10:2-4). The chapter opened with Jesus sending the disciples on a

missionary journey with very specific instructions to bring nothing with them and to expect persecution. This first mission was specifically to the Jews; they were to "Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (vv. 5-6). Jesus sent them out as "sheep among wolves," to be "wise as serpents," "innocent as doves," and to "beware of men" who would persecute them (vv. 16 – 21). They were not to fear them, and Jesus reminded them that "even the hairs of the head were numbered" (vv. 26, 30). Jesus' instruction in this preface to today's reading extended not only to the immediate context of His disciples' journey, but also to all believers going out into the world to spread the Gospel message. "I say to you, you will not have gone through all of the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes" (v. 23).

All our longtime readers will understand that the addition of the two verses before today's reading is to provide the full context of the reading. As you read, take special note of repeated words, phrases, and patterns in the text.

Gospel Reading:

> *Verses before today's reading:*
> *Matthew 10:34-36 NAS95 34 "Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. 35 For I came to SET A MAN AGAINST HIS FATHER, AND A DAUGHTER AGAINST HER MOTHER, AND A DAUGHTER-IN-LAW AGAINST HER MOTHER-IN-LAW; 36 and A MAN'S ENEMIES WILL BE THE MEMBERS OF HIS HOUSEHOLD.*
> *Today's Reading*
> *Matthew 10:37-42 NAS95 37 "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. 38 And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. 39 He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it. 40 He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me. 41 He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. 42 And whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you, he shall not lose his reward."*

The reading is filled with repeated phrases and the use of a literary technique called parallelism. In the first case, we see the phrase "not worthy of Me" or just the word "Me" repeated multiple times in verses 37 – 40. I counted a total of eight repeats of the word "Me" and three of the phrase "not

worthy of Me." The latter condition, literary parallelism, occurs throughout the reading. Both literary techniques are used to bring attention to the big ideas in the text, the conflict arising from one's choice to follow Jesus, and the rewards of doing so. We see,

"Jesus brought not peace / but a sword."

> "Jesus pits man / against father."
> And, "Daughter / against mother," or "daughter-in-law against mother" (imagine that!).
> "He who loves their father or mother more than Me / is not worthy of Me."And,
> "Loves son or daughter more than Me / not worthy of Me."
> A person "Not willing to carry one's cross / is not worthy of Me."
> "People receive your Gospel message / receives Me."

The reward for persisting in all the conflicts that Jesus warned us about is the reward of a prophet (meaning anyone who carries Jesus' message), and a righteous man (meaning all believers) "vv. 41 – 42), eternal rewards which shall never be taken away "v. 42c).

What does it mean to take up one's cross, follow Jesus, and persist during persecution (v. 38)? I remember, as a child, attending catechism classes and being taught about the burden of carrying one's cross. The context of this teaching, as I remember it, was more about continuing a grueling journey of self-sacrifice rather than the big idea presented by Jesus in the reading. Here, Jesus presented the concept of making hard choices through God's empowerment of us to oppose the worldly kingdom in favor of following Him and presenting His message to a God-rejecting universe. Jesus is clear that these choices could even include forsaking one's own family in order to follow what Jesus is calling one to do. As followers of Jesus, we understand that carrying one's cross for Christ is joyful, not the drudgery I imagined from the picture portrayed in my catechism classes. Jesus said just a few verses later, "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. Mt 11:30 "For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:29-30). The bottom line of the reading is that, as believers in Jesus, we must expect persecution and make the hard choices God calls us to make.

There is a popular song from the 70's by Rupert Holmes named "Him" in which the chorus line says, "Him, him, him, what's she gonna do about him?" The meaning of the song is **far** different than our spiritual relationship with God. However, if you are someone like me whose mind is often filled with repeating chorus lines, we do have to ask ourselves the question. Him, him, him, what are **we** going

to do about him? Jesus calls us to decide what to do about **Him**. It's Him, or it's me. Serving God or serving self. This is a conscious step of faith one must make. As believers, we rejoice in the fact that regardless of how we may feel from day to day, our final judgment is not guilty. Jesus has borne our sins on the cross forever. He bore the penalty of our sin by suffering in our place, something that only the perfect, sinless Son of God could do. We cannot increase the burden of personal cross and add anything to what Jesus completed for us through His carrying of the cross once and for all.

Reflection Questions

1. As you contemplate the story of Elijah's miracle from the first reading, what are one or two things for which you would like to ask God? Share these with another believer and ask them to pray that God would bring them about or a change in circumstances.

2. What is your perspective on carrying your cross? In what ways does understanding Jesus' promise of persecution help you in this regard?

Sunday Mass Study Notes for 06-30-2024

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



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we examine Saint Paul's letter to the Corinthian believers, encouraging them to be generous with their suffering brothers and sisters in Christ. The Gospel lesson tells the story of Jesus healing two marginalized people: a little girl who died and a woman who suffered with bleeding for many years. In both passages, we see that the heart of God is tender toward those who are suffering.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the apocryphal book of Wisdom.

First Reading:

> *Wis 1:13-15; 2:23-24 God did not make death,*
> *nor does he rejoice in the destruction of the living.*
> *For he fashioned all things that they might have being;*
> *and the creatures of the world are wholesome,*
> *and there is not a destructive drug among them*

> *nor any domain of the netherworld on earth,*
> *for justice is undying.*
> *For God formed man to be imperishable;*
> *the image of his own nature he made him.*
> *But by the envy of the devil, death entered the world,*
> *and they who belong to his company experience it.*

Death was not God's original plan for the world, rather death came into existence through sin. We see that in Saint Paul's Letter to the Romans. "*Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned*" (Romans 5:12). When God first created the world, it was "very good" (Genesis 1:31). Sin came about when Adam willingly sinned against God by following the lead of his wife Eve, who was misled by Satan (Genesis 3:6). One day this eternal, sinless perfect life will be restored upon the earth when Jesus returns to rule and reign.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

On his third missionary journey, Saint Paul encouraged Gentile Christians to help their struggling brothers and sisters in Christ who were impacted by a severe famine in Jerusalem (see Acts 24:17). In this part of his letter to the believers in Corinth, he is urging them to excel at being financially generous and to complete their pledge of support to those who are in physical need. In the first part of this section, he commends them for leading the way in their faith and conduct. He then asks them to become leaders in the area of generosity. So it is not only important to want to give, but to follow through and actually sacrifice on behalf of others. He calls the act of giving a "gracious work" (v. 7). He then ties in this "gracious work" with the sacrifice that Christ made on our behalf, which is the motivating force behind the compassionate giving that should characterize Christians.

Second Reading:

(Verses 8, 10, and 11 which were omitted from the reading were included in order to provide the full context and meaning).

> *2 Corinthians 8:7-15 NAS95 7 "But just as you abound in everything, in faith and utterance and knowledge and in all earnestness and in the love we inspired in you, see that you abound in this gracious work also. 8 I am not speaking this as a command, but as proving through the*

> *earnestness of others the sincerity of your love also. 9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich. 10 I give my opinion in this matter, for this is to your advantage, who were the first to begin a year ago not only to do this, but also to desire to do it. 11 But now finish doing it also, so that just as there was the readiness to desire it, so there may be also the completion of it by your ability. 12 For if the readiness is present, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have. 13 For this is not for the ease of others and for your affliction, but by way of equality– 14 at this present time your abundance being a supply for their need, so that their abundance also may become a supply for your need, that there may be equality; 15 as it is written, "HE WHO gathered MUCH DID NOT HAVE TOO MUCH, AND HE WHO gathered LITTLE HAD NO LACK."*

Saint Paul points out a few key principles to encourage the Corinthian believers to follow through on their pledge to provide financial relief to the starving Christians in Jerusalem. Paul challenged the Corinthians to be generous in giving the things that God had so generously provided, saying that they "abound in everything" else (v. 7), so why would generosity not be part of their reputation as well? This calling to give was not a command but rather a challenge that Paul provided to reveal the true "sincerity of [their] love" (v. 8b). He is clear that this calling to gracious giving is his opinion, but from what we know about the other times that Paul has given his personal views it is a sound biblical principle if not an outright command.

Paul went on to explain how Jesus was the example of sacrificial giving by saying, "though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich" (v. 9b –ff). Paul's reasoning is twofold. One, if the Corinthians give during their times of prosperity they can count upon other Christians to give to them during their own time of need. The most basic decency of a human citizen of the world is in giving to others in need out of one's abundance. Second, sacrificial giving is evidence of their true calling to serve God. Although a seed must of course be initially planted, it doesn't go far without proper watering and continued nurturing. Paul admonished the Corinthians not to just begin the good work of giving, but to carry it to completion (v. 11). He closed with a quote from Exodus 16:18, a passage in which Moses explained how through God's sovereign control everyone gathered manna in the exact amount that they required. In the new economy of God after the Exodus God called the Hebrews and all people subsequent to them to act as His agent in distributing goods evenly from each person's excess to fill other people's needs.

What was happening back then historically can be a lesson to us in our own day and age. First, he calls them to recognize the connectedness of the universal church. He challenged them to step up to the plate and become an example for the other churches, who were already contributing generously to the cause of helping their brothers and sisters. Paul wrote to this group of believers in a previous

letter about the connectedness of the church by calling Christians the "body of Christ". In explaining how each believer is interdependent, he said, "And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it" (1 Corinthians 12:26). What happens to one believer (good or bad) impacts the rest of the body. This interconnectedness with the universal church should awaken our sensitivity to others around us; those we know and even those we do not know. Being others-oriented can release us from the tyranny of self-absorption, which is more oppressive than we often recognize. God's structure of connecting us to the larger body of Christ and giving us an awareness of others in need is a blessing to our spiritual growth and maturity.

The second main point that Paul makes about giving in this passage is that the motive behind the giving is more important than the actual amount of the gift. He emphasizes that generous giving can be an outward display of sincerity of heart and love for others. The supreme example of generous giving is Jesus Christ Himself. Though Christ had all of the privileges of heaven, He gave up His rightful place of authority and riches to submit Himself to the poverty of this world. One of the earliest hymns of the church focused on Christ's humility for our sake and reinforces the theme of why we should be generous to others. It is a way that we can show the world who Jesus is. The following Scripture helps us to understand this more.

> *Philippians 2:5-11 NAS95 5 "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, 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. 9 For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."*

The end result is that through Christ's lowering of Himself to our poverty level, He could bring us to a place of richness beyond what this world could offer. Being motivated by Christ's great sacrifice for us is a sign of really understanding the immensity of grace that has been given to us.

Another important and encouraging principle that Saint Paul gives in regard to giving is that God entrusts us with different amounts of financial means so that we might steward resources in a way that promotes equality and unity in the body of Christ. Some parts of our world have very little in regard to material resources. These ones who are not rich in the world's eyes are often rich in other resources, such as faith, relationships and having an eternal perspective. Paul says that their richness can supply what a materially wealthy community of believers might not have. And a

materially wealthy community can benefit those who are impoverished by giving sacrificially and providing a sense of unity among the believers (see also 1 Timothy 6:11-19). So while God could magically provide for all of the needs in the world, He does not override the will of believers, but instead, trusts us to live in the power of Christ so that we participate in this "gracious work". We have received grace and so we give graciously to others out of the abundance of what Christ has given to us. This passage encourages all believers to consider our part in being the hands and feet of Christ.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading is from Mark where we will see the story of a miraculous healing.

Gospel Reading:

> *Mark 5:21-43 NAS95 21 When Jesus had crossed over again in the boat to the other side, a large crowd gathered around Him; and so He stayed by the seashore. 22 One of the synagogue officials named Jairus came up, and on seeing Him, fell at His feet 23 and implored Him earnestly, saying, "My little daughter is at the point of death; please come and lay Your hands on her, so that she will get well and live." 24 And He went off with him; and a large crowd was following Him and pressing in on Him. 25 A woman who had had a hemorrhage for twelve years, 26 and had endured much at the hands of many physicians, and had spent all that she had and was not helped at all, but rather had grown worse– 27 after hearing about Jesus, she came up in the crowd behind Him and touched His cloak. 28 For she thought, "If I just touch His garments, I will get well." 29 Immediately the flow of her blood was dried up; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her affliction. 30 Immediately Jesus, perceiving in Himself that the power proceeding from Him had gone forth, turned around in the crowd and said, "Who touched My garments?" 31 And His disciples said to Him, "You see the crowd pressing in on You, and You say, 'Who touched Me?'" 32 And He looked around to see the woman who had done this. 33 But the woman fearing and trembling, aware of what had happened to her, came and fell down before Him and told Him the whole truth. 34 And He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace and be healed of your affliction." 35 While He was still speaking, they came from the house of the synagogue official, saying, "Your daughter has died; why trouble the Teacher anymore?" 36 But Jesus, overhearing what was being spoken, said to the synagogue official, "Do not be afraid any longer, only believe." 37 And He allowed no one to accompany Him, except Peter and James and John the brother of James. 38 They came to the house of the synagogue official; and He saw a commotion, and people loudly weeping and wailing. 39 And entering in, He said to them, "Why make a*

> *commotion and weep? The child has not died, but is asleep." 40 They began laughing at Him. But putting them all out, He took along the child's father and mother and His own companions, and entered the room where the child was. 41 Taking the child by the hand, He said to her, "Talitha kum!" (which translated means, "Little girl, I say to you, get up!"). 42 Immediately the girl got up and began to walk, for she was twelve years old. And immediately they were completely astounded. 43 And He gave them strict orders that no one should know about this, and He said that something should be given her to eat.*

This is a powerful story of Jesus' healing power and His compassion for marginalized people. The two females in this story ran parallel lives until the day that Jesus came to town. The day the little girl was born must have brought great joy to Jairus and his family twelve years earlier. Jairus was a religious man, obviously respected in the community, which is shown by his upfront request to have Jesus come to his home to heal his daughter. At the time when this little girl came into the world, the woman with the hemorrhage began her long journey on her desperate reach toward her last hope, Jesus. Twelve years was a long time to be struggling with a bleeding issue, which would have marginalized her in the ceremonial world of the Jews as "unclean" in everyday social settings. After twelve long years of seeking help in every possible form, it is understandable how desperate she would have been. She was so desperate that she was willing to go against the social taboo of being in a crowd of people even though she was "unclean" in order to reach out and touch Jesus' garment in hopes of being healed.

In the end, Jesus did heal her, but not without correcting her theology. While she placed all her hope in touching his garment, as if his clothes held some special force that could be invoked by her grasping reach, He helped her to see that it was her faith that so moved the heart of God to heal her. This is an important point for all of us to recognize. Faith is living as if something unseen and unrealized is actually at work. When your faith is put in God, it means to lean your full weight on Him, as if there is no other lifeline. The Bible describes it this way: "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). It also says that without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). Jesus thought that it was important for her to understand that she was healed by reaching out to the right Person, not because of her superstitious beliefs.

Now that the woman was healed and made clean, it was time for Jesus to turn his attention to the original request that brought Him on the journey to begin with, Jairus' daughter. She was sick when Jairus went to implore Jesus to come heal her. But in this delay, she died, and the report came to Jairus that all hope for healing was gone. Jesus, though, encouraged Jairus to have faith and believe that He could not only heal a sick daughter, but that He could also bring her back to life. The Gospel records other incidents where Jesus raised people back to life: the widow's son (Luke 7:13-15) and Lazarus (John 11:43-44). These important accounts were recorded so that we could believe and have

life that is truly life in Jesus. Saint John put it this way: "Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 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).

How does this story contribute to our understanding of Jesus and the role of humans as we seek to have relationship with Him? We learn that Jesus is God because He has power to heal and to raise the dead. While magicians and charlatans could conjure up evil powers to perform signs and wonders, no one but God has the authority to bring people back from the dead. It is clear from this account that the Gospel writer is making a case for Jesus' divinity and authority. Our response, then, is will we believe and surrender to His divinity and authority in our own lives? Will we come to Him as the One who said that He is the way, the truth and the LIFE (John 14:6)? Or will we try to find life on our own terms, pursuing a little bit of religion to satisfy our guilty conscience? Obviously, the Gospel writers went to great lengths to provide enough information about Jesus to convince us of His rightful place as King and Lord of our lives. May our search for His leadership in our lives be as desperate and as focused as that of Jairus and the woman with the bleeding issue.

As I type, I am reminded of a recent incident that has left me desperate for Jesus to be in control of my life and to experience His lordship over my knee-jerk reaction to defend myself. I was criticized for not doing part of my job well. At first I wanted to defend myself and prove my worth to others. But after taking a deep breath, I turned to Jesus and silently asked Him what He wanted me to learn in this situation. I still don't know what that is, but I trust that He will help me to let Him be Lord of my life so that I don't have to rely on my accomplishments or my self-defense to prop up my ego. Instead of taking matters into my own hands and trying to find life in my own sense of self-righteousness, I can rely on Him, leaning my full weight on His perfection. I can learn from people's criticism and solicit feedback so that I can learn and grow. We are all a work in progress!

Reflection Questions

1. How do you feel when you consider the great compassion that Jesus had for the two women who were in need? What needs do you have that you can talk to Him about today? How does knowing His compassion for you encourage your approach to Him?

2. In both passages, Jesus was highlighted as One who has ultimate power. In the New Testament

lesson, He became poor to bring us to His heavenly riches and in the Gospel lesson, He was able to heal and raise the dead. When you look at your life and the obstacles that seem to get you down, how does knowing that Christ has ultimate power influence your walk of faith? Sometimes, we are discouraged because we do not see Him using His power to do what we think He should do on our behalf. But take a few moments and ask Him to help you to see where He wants to exercise His authority in your life. See if in this next week your heart might be willing to desperately seek out His lordship in your life as you come up against obstacles and discouragement.

3. The Bible says to pray without ceasing (1 Thess 5:17) regardless of the circumstances. How hard do you think the woman in this story prayed for help? Since she had nowhere else to turn it's easy to imagine that she was very persistent in her calling upon God for help. Certainly, God allowed these dire circumstances in the woman's life in order to bring her to faith in the Lord Jesus for the forgiveness of her sins. Perhaps the woman was always faithful to pray, even before she became afflicted with the disease. Jairus, too, was a religious man, yet he lost his little daughter to a terrible illness. He knew where to turn when life got out of control. He desperately searched for Jesus, the Son of God and the rightful Lord of the universe. These two individuals are pictures of desperate hearts seeking God's help.

How bad do things have to get before we pray? Regardless of our circumstances**, God has called usnot to wait until troubles come our way, but to be faithful and pray in order to obey.** This includes praying not only about our needs but also for the needs of others.

What are some practical ways that we may improve our level of persistence in prayer? Here are some methods that have worked for me, although they may not be suitable for everyone.

A. Write your prayer requests down on a 3×5 card. Carry this with you and as you find time pray throughout the day. It's helpful to categorize your requests, such as "Healing" or "Come to Faith in Jesus."

B. A very easy way to remember to pray for a very short list of people is to assign each of them to one finger, I call these "finger prayers." If you want to go one step further, meet with one of them, and when you pray with them the first time have them hold that particular finger and tell them that this will help you to pray for them.

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

C. Consider the concept of constructing a kind of "prayer maze" in your head by assigning the people for whom you are praying to a geographical map of where they are located. For example, you could begin by praying for people in your home town, then move on to prayers for those located in the western part of your state, then to the north, east, and so on. This has proven very helpful to me since many times I pray for people during my daily exercise where I would not have access to cards on which I had listed prayer requests.

D. Finally, pray! Ask God to show you ways to improve your prayer life. In a previous edition of Mass Notes, we discussed Luke 16:1-13. The application of this text was that God has called us to use our talents and ingenuity in order to lead people to the knowledge of Jesus Christ. Pray and ask God to energize your prayer life through the use of your time, talents, and materials possessions. This includes using our technological devices like smart phones and computers.

Sunday Mass Study Notes for 06-26-2022



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. A key verse this week that links all three readings together is in the second reading from Galatians, "For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things

that you please" (Galatians 5:17). We desire to accomplish great things for God, but our flesh works against us. When we cooperate with our carnal, fleshly desires, we may not achieve the full potential that God has for us. We will see how these forces rage among the people in all three of today's readings.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The context of the first reading from First Kings is just before the appointment of Nimshi as the King of the Northern tribes of Israel and the replacement of Elijah by the prophet Elisha. Elijah, the great prophet of God, had just killed the prophets of Baal after the great contest at Mount Carmel. When King Ahab's evil wife Jezebel found out about the slaying of the prophets she set out to kill Elijah (1 Kings 19:2). This caused Elijah to flee and he came to believe that he was the only believer left in the entire kingdom. Elijah said, "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars and killed Your prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away" (1 Kings 19:10). God replied as we see in today's reading and corrected his false assumption.

First Reading:

1 Kings 19:16-21 NAS95 16 and Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint king over Israel; and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place. 17 "It shall come about, the one who escapes from the sword of Hazael, Jehu shall put to death, and the one who escapes from the sword of Jehu, Elisha shall put to death. 18 "Yet I will leave 7,000 in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal and every mouth that has not kissed him." 19 So he departed from there and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, while he was plowing with twelve pairs of oxen before him, and he with the twelfth. And Elijah passed over to him and threw his mantle on him. 20 He left the oxen and ran after Elijah and said, "Please let me kiss my father and my mother, then I will follow you." And he said to him, "Go back again, for what have I done to you?" 21 So he returned from following him, and took the pair of oxen and sacrificed them and boiled their flesh with the implements of the oxen, and gave it to the people and they ate. Then he arose and followed Elijah and ministered to him.

God gave Elijah specific guidance to appoint Jehu as the king of Israel and to anoint Elisha as his own successor (v. 16). God told Elijah that he wasn't the only believer left and that He had 7,000 true believers left in the kingdom (v. 18). Next, Elijah went and found Elisha out working and placed his prophetic mantle (clothing) on him. When Elisha wavered about immediately accepting this responsibility Elijah told him, in effect, that to forsake this appointment would be an affront to God (v. 20). So Elisha accepted his new position and made a traditional sacrifice to confirm the "covenant" made between him and God to fulfill the prophecy given to Elijah.

The reading points out just how bad conditions had become in Israel such that Elijah believed that he was the only believer left alive. However, it is interesting that while 7,000 believers remained, even that was a very low number in view of the large size of the nation. Evidently most of the people had succumbed to the evil pagan worship practices memorialized in the Bible by King Jeroboam the son of Nabat who is recorded as a standard of evil. We see that standard mentioned earlier in First Kings. "For he walked in all the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat and in his sins which he made Israel sin, provoking the LORD God of Israel with their idols" (1 Kings 16:26).

The big idea in the reading is regarding the supreme sovereignty of God. Even when the great prophet in the entire world felt that all hope was lost, God continued making plans for the future of the kingdom and reminding him of His omniscience and long-term view. In our age we can look to this passage to be reminded that God has our best interests in mind, is establishing future plans for us as well as all believers, and even when we feel totally spiritually alone our sovereign Father is superintending the circumstances for His glory and our best interests.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The context of the reading from Galatians is Saint Paul's teaching on the freedom believers possess in Christ as contrasted to the bondage that the false teachers were imposing upon the people by instructing them that they must obey the Mosaic Law. Paul explains further in the reading the battle between a believer's spirit and their flesh.

Second Reading:

Galatians 5:1 NAS95 1 It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and

do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.

Galatians 5:13-18 NAS95 13 For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. 14 For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." 15 But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another. 16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. 17 For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.

Paul reminded the believers in Galatia of their overarching purpose by quoting from the Mosaic Law in Leviticus 19:18: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." He cautioned them not to use their freedom in Christ to take advantage of their "neighbors." The Jews of that time had come to understand their neighbor in a very narrow sense, such that it only included their fellow countrymen. Jesus had earlier corrected this false teaching in Luke Chapter 10. There Jesus explained the meaning of "neighbor" by telling them the parable of the Good Samaritan. Jesus explained to His disciples that, of all the people who passed by the man who had fallen at the hands of robbers, the only one who acted as a true neighbor as intended by God in Leviticus 19:18 was "The one who showed mercy toward him" (Luke 10:37). This is extremely important in this context because the Epistle to the Galatians was directed at the false teachers who taught that in order for people to be saved, they must obey the constraints of the Mosaic Law making them, in effect, proselyte Jews. Paul and Jesus taught something quite different, that the neighborhood of God included anyone who was in need. Our true family includes those who have come to the Father through faith in the Son (John 3:16). Therefore, instead of trying to follow all of the contours of the Mosaic law, one would fulfill the spirit of the law by being a loving person. The only way a person can be truly loving (self-sacrificing and honoring of others above self) is if their heart is surrendered to God and His Spirit is now in control of the individual. The difference between someone who tries really hard to be a good person and one who is a Christian, is the power of the Holy Spirit alive in one's heart. The Holy Spirit is God's evidence that His life is inside a believer. While a believer is a work in progress and will not be perfect in this life, a fundamental change has taken place when we surrender ourselves to God through Christ. A new relationship has begun, and we are under the influence of God's Spirit, which transforms us. We begin to walk in step with the values of God's Spirit. And since God is love, it makes sense that He teaches us how to be more loving. This is not a matter of self-effort, but a growth in the life of God who makes His home in our hearts. Paul was clear that "*if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law*" (v. 18).

One wonders if at times Paul felt marginalized like Elijah as we discussed in the first reading where

the prophet had fled from evil Jezebel's murderous plot. Paul, surrounded by false teachers that plotted to drag believers into the strictures of Jewish legalism, expressed God's prophetic word regarding the freedom that was to be found only through faith in Jesus Christ.

In our lives, we must ask ourselves in what ways are we attempting to work out our own salvation through obedience to some form of religious law. It's hard not to notice those in our neighborhoods who never seem to leave their houses on Sunday morning to go to church. Do we hold to a false belief system that we are a pretty good person because we have faithfully attended Mass on Sundays and holy days that we are somehow going to be set apart from others who have not so zealously obeyed the commandments of the church? When we place our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins we have moved from darkness into light (1 Peter 2:9). The difference between a person that has truly trusted in Jesus versus the one that is relying upon their own works for salvation is subtle but very real as Jesus explained to Nicodemus. In John Chapter 3 Nicodemus, a legalistic Jew from the group known as the Pharisees, was a Rabbi who came to Jesus at night for fear of the Jews (John 3:2). Jesus explained to Nicodemus how he could only enter the kingdom of heaven through faith in Him. In one of the most important verses in the entire Bible, Jesus told him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). Jesus went on to explain to him that in addition to the obvious necessity of physical birth, something much less obvious was necessary. In order to become a citizen of heaven one must be born spiritually through faith in God's Son. He told Nicodemus, "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. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him." (John 3:16-17).

If you are struggling with understanding the true motives of your heart, the Scripture says that you should call out to God in prayer. Paul said, "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; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation" (Romans 10:9-10). As we move to the final reading this week, take a moment to affirm your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The context of the reading is Luke's recording of the beginning of the end of Jesus' earthly life just before he gave His life for us on the cross at Calvary. Earlier the disciples had been arguing over who among them was the greatest. Jesus then presented them with a child and told them, "Whoever

receives this child in My name receives Me, and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me; for the one who is least among all of you, this is the one who is great" (Luke 9:48). He then corrected His disciples who had rebuked someone for casting out demons in the name of Jesus, saying "Do not hinder him; for he who is not against you is for you" (v. 50). This hints at some of the same tension that Paul was indicating in the second reading between the strict followers of the Law and those that followed it less closely or held to other religious traditions. Nowhere was this tension more evident than in the region of Samaria where the people were held in contempt by the Jewish legalists. The Samaritans were considered a half breed people since they had been overtaken by the Assyrian Empire during the fall of the Northern Kingdom in 722 BC. Interestingly, Jesus turned to this despised group for help in making the preparations for the celebration of His last Passover feast. This was the Passover after which the true Lamb of God would be sacrificed for the sins of the world.

Gospel Reading:

Luke 9:51-62 NAS95 51 When the days were approaching for His ascension, He was determined to go to Jerusalem; 52 and He sent messengers on ahead of Him, and they went and entered a village of the Samaritans to make arrangements for Him. 53 But they did not receive Him, because He was traveling toward Jerusalem. 54 When His disciples James and John saw this, they said, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" 55 But He turned and rebuked them, and said, "You do not know what kind of spirit you are of; 56 for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." And they went on to another village. 57 As they were going along the road, someone said to Him, "I will follow You wherever You go." 58 And Jesus said to him, "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." 59 And He said to another, "Follow Me." But he said, "Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father." 60 But He said to him, "Allow the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God." 61 Another also said, "I will follow You, Lord; but first permit me to say good-bye to those at home." 62 But Jesus said to him, "No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

We see in the reading that the Samaritans didn't welcome Jesus' disciples' efforts in making the arrangements for the Passover feast even though Jesus had sent messengers ahead of time to them (vv. 52-53). Instead, they were forced to travel on to another village, one which was very likely outside the constraints of Samaritan beliefs. When James and John, named by Jesus the "Sons of Thunder" (Mark 3:17), were confronted with the rejection of their efforts they showed their passion and love for Jesus by asking Him whether they should command fire to come down from the sky and destroy the Samaritans (v. 54). The disciples were familiar with how Elijah had commanded fire to come down from the sky to consume the sacrifice during the contest with the prophets of Baal, but now they were asking not to burn already dead cattle but rather living people! Jesus quickly

corrected their false thinking and reminded them that He didn't come to "*destroy men's lives, but to save them"* (v. 56). This is reminiscent of what we read in our discussion of the second reading from John 3:17 where Jesus said, "For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him." As the reading progressed, Jesus taught His disciples about true discipleship and answering the calling of God. A true disciple would have to be willing to not only forsake their comfortable home (v. 58) but also to forsake their family in order to follow Him (v. 59). Here we see a clear parallel with Elisha's initial response to God's call through Elijah that we read about in the first reading.

As believers in the Lord Jesus, we are called to forsake the things which hold us back to true obedience of the Lord Jesus. As we saw in the first reading, when God places a calling upon our lives, we are to respond in obedience. Our answer must be to forsake the things which may hold us back, whether they be family, as we saw in the Gospel reading, or religious practices as we saw in the second. Like Elisha, even if in our humanness we hesitate for a moment while we count the cost of our obedience, we are called to respond in faith by following the directives given to us by God. As a first step of belief we are called to forsake the false understanding that we are saved from our good works and rather seeing that our deeds flow from our relationship with God. As we enter into God's invisible spiritual kingdom, the "kingdom of heaven" that Jesus explained to Nicodemus in John 3:3, we participate through God's power, as Paul said in the reading from Galatians, being led by the Spirit. At times, although we too may desire to command fire down from heaven to consume our adversaries, Jesus calls us to a higher standard by recognizing these people as our "neighbors." This battle will continue for the duration of our life here on earth, "For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please" (Galatians 5:17).

Reflection Questions

1. Most Christians are not known for their love. Instead, the world characterizes us as judgmental, harsh, and angry. Who are the "neighbors" that you regularly interact with? What would it look like for you to walk in the Spirit and change this characterization with your "neighbor?"

2. Jesus illustrated true discipleship as a relationship with Him that prioritized Him above all other priorities. In what ways have you made intentional decisions to orient your life around His Kingdom principles? What has been the cost of discipleship for you? Are there any new ways that He is asking you to follow Him?

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 06-27-2021



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we examine Saint Paul's letter to the Corinthian believers, encouraging them to be generous with their suffering brothers and sisters in Christ. The Gospel lesson tells the story of Jesus healing two marginalized people: a little girl who died and a woman who suffered with bleeding for many years. In both passages, we see that the heart of God is tender toward those who are suffering.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the apocryphal book of Wisdom.

First Reading:

Wis 1:13-15; 2:23-24 God did not make death,

nor does he rejoice in the destruction of the living.

For he fashioned all things that they might have being;

and the creatures of the world are wholesome,

and there is not a destructive drug among them

nor any domain of the netherworld on earth,

for justice is undying.

For God formed man to be imperishable;

the image of his own nature he made him.

But by the envy of the devil, death entered the world,

and they who belong to his company experience it.

Death was not God's original plan for the world, rather death came into existence through sin. We see that in Saint Paul's Letter to the Romans. "*Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned*" (Romans 5:12). When God first created the world, it was "very good" (Genesis 1:31). Sin came about when Adam willingly sinned against God by following the lead of his wife Eve who was misled by Satan (Genesis 3:6). One day this eternal, sinless perfect life will be restored upon earth when Jesus returns to rule and reign.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

On his third missionary journey, Saint Paul encouraged Gentile Christians to help their struggling brothers and sisters in Christ who were impacted by a severe famine in Jerusalem (see Acts 24:17). In this part of his letter to the believers in Corinth, he is urging them to excel at being financially generous and to complete their pledge of support to those who are in physical need. In the first part of this section, he commends them for leading the way in their faith and conduct. He then asks them to become leaders in the area of generosity. So it is not only important to want to give, but to follow through and actually sacrifice on behalf of others. He calls the act of giving a "gracious work" (v. 7). He then ties in this "gracious work" with the sacrifice that Christ made on our behalf, which is the motivating force behind the compassionate giving that should characterize Christians.

Second Reading:

(Verses 8, 10, and 11 which were omitted from the reading were included in order to provide the full context and meaning).

2 Corinthians 8:7-15 NAS95 7 "But just as you abound in everything, in faith and utterance and knowledge and in all earnestness and in the love we inspired in you, see that you abound in this gracious work also. 8 I am not speaking this as a command, but as proving through the earnestness of others the sincerity of your love also. 9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich. 10 I give my opinion in this matter, for this is to your advantage, who were the first to begin a year ago not only to do this, but also to desire to do it. 11 But now finish doing it also, so that just as there was the readiness to desire it, so there may be also the completion of it by your ability. 12 For if the readiness is present, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have. 13 For this is not for the ease of others and for your affliction, but by way of equality– 14 at this present time your abundance being a supply for their need, so that their abundance also may become a supply for your need, that there may be equality; 15 as it is written, "HE WHO gathered MUCH DID NOT HAVE TOO MUCH, AND HE WHO gathered LITTLE HAD NO LACK."

Saint Paul points out a few key principles to encourage the Corinthian believers to follow through on their pledge to provide financial relief to the starving Christians in Jerusalem. Paul challenged the Corinthians to be generous in giving the things that God had so generously provided, saying that they "abound in everything" else (v. 7), so why would generosity not be part of their reputation as well? This calling to give was not a command but rather a challenge that Paul provided to reveal the true "sincerity of [their] love" (v. 8b). He is clear that this calling to gracious giving is his opinion,

but from what we know about the other times that Paul has given his personal views it is a sound biblical principle if not an outright command.

Paul went on to explain how Jesus was the example of sacrificial giving by saying, "though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich" (v. 9b –ff). Paul's reasoning is twofold. One, if the Corinthians give during their times of prosperity they can count upon other Christians to give to them during their own time of need. The most basic decency of a human citizen of the world is in giving to others in need out of one's abundance. Second, sacrificial giving is evidence of their true calling to serve God. Although a seed must of course be initially planted, it doesn't go far without proper watering and continued nurturing. Paul admonished the Corinthians not to just begin the good work of giving, but to carry it to completion (v. 11). He closed with a quote from Exodus 16:18, a passage in which Moses explained how through God's sovereign control everyone gathered manna in the exact amount that they required. In the new economy of God after the Exodus God called the Hebrews and all people subsequent to them to act as His agent in distributing goods evenly from each person's excess to fill other people's needs.

What was happening back then historically can be a lesson to us in our own day and age. First, he calls them to recognize the connectedness of the universal church. He challenged them to step up to the plate and become an example for the other churches, who were already contributing generously to the cause of helping their brothers and sisters. Paul wrote to this group of believers in a previous letter about the connectedness of the church by calling Christians the "body of Christ". In explaining how each believer is interdependent, he said, "And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it" (1 Corinthians 12:26). What happens to one believer (good or bad) impacts the rest of the body. This interconnectedness with the universal church should awaken our sensitivity to others around us; those we know and even those we do not know. Being others-oriented can release us from the tyranny of self-absorption, which is more oppressive than we often recognize. God's structure of connecting us to the larger body of Christ and giving us an awareness of others in need is a blessing to our spiritual growth and maturity.

The second main point that Paul makes about giving in this passage is that the motive behind the giving is more important than the actual amount of the gift. He emphasizes that generous giving can be an outward display of sincerity of heart and love for others. The supreme example of generous giving is Jesus Christ Himself. Though Christ had all of the privileges of heaven, He gave up His rightful place of authority and riches to submit Himself to the poverty of this world. One of the early hymns of the church focused on Christ's humility for our sake and reinforces the theme of why we should be generous to others. It is a way that we can show the world who Jesus is. The following Scripture helps us to understand this more.

Philippians 2:5-11 NAS95 5 "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, 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. 9 For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

The end result is that through Christ's lowering of Himself to our poverty level, He could bring us to a place of richness beyond what this world could offer. Being motivated by Christ's great sacrifice for us is a sign of really understanding the immensity of grace that has been given to us.

Another important and encouraging principle that Saint Paul gives in regard to giving is that God entrusts us with different amounts of financial means so that we might steward resources in a way that promotes equality and unity in the body of Christ. Some parts of our world have very little in regard to material resources. These ones who are not rich in the world's eyes are often rich in other resources, such as faith, relationships and having an eternal perspective. Paul says that their richness can supply what a materially wealthy community of believers might not have. And a materially wealthy community can benefit those who are impoverished by giving sacrificially and providing a sense of unity among the believers (see also 1 Timothy 6:11-19). So while God could magically provide for all of the needs in the world, He does not override the will of believers, but instead, trusts us to live in the power of Christ so that we participate in this "gracious work". We have received grace and so we give graciously to others out of the abundance of what Christ has given to us. This passage encourages all believers to consider our part in being the hands and feet of Christ.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading is from Mark where we will see the story of a miraculous healing.

Gospel Reading:

Mark 5:21-43 NAS95 21 When Jesus had crossed over again in the boat to the other side, a large crowd gathered around Him; and so He stayed by the seashore. 22 One of the synagogue officials named Jairus came up, and on seeing Him, fell at His feet 23 and implored Him earnestly, saying, "My little daughter is at the point of death; please come and lay Your hands on her, so that she will get well and live." 24 And He went off with him; and a large crowd was following Him and pressing in on Him. 25 A woman who had had a hemorrhage for twelve years, 26 and had endured much at the hands of many physicians, and had spent all that she had and was not helped at all, but rather had grown worse– 27 after hearing about Jesus, she came up in the crowd behind Him and touched His cloak. 28 For she thought, "If I just touch His garments, I will get well." 29 Immediately the flow of her blood was dried up; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her affliction. 30 Immediately Jesus, perceiving in Himself that the power proceeding from Him had gone forth, turned around in the crowd and said, "Who touched My garments?" 31 And His disciples said to Him, "You see the crowd pressing in on You, and You say, 'Who touched Me?'" 32 And He looked around to see the woman who had done this. 33 But the woman fearing and trembling, aware of what had happened to her, came and fell down before Him and told Him the whole truth. 34 And He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace and be healed of your affliction." 35 While He was still speaking, they came from the house of the synagogue official, saying, "Your daughter has died; why trouble the Teacher anymore?" 36 But Jesus, overhearing what was being spoken, said to the synagogue official, "Do not be afraid any longer, only believe." 37 And He allowed no one to accompany Him, except Peter and James and John the brother of James. 38 They came to the house of the synagogue official; and He saw a commotion, and people loudly weeping and wailing. 39 And entering in, He said to them, "Why make a commotion and weep? The child has not died, but is asleep." 40 They began laughing at Him. But putting them all out, He took along the child's father and mother and His own companions, and entered the room where the child was. 41 Taking the child by the hand, He said to her, "Talitha kum!" (which translated means, "Little girl, I say to you, get up!"). 42 Immediately the girl got up and began to walk, for she was twelve years old. And immediately they were completely astounded. 43 And He gave them strict orders that no one should know about this, and He said that something should be given her to eat.

This is a powerful story of Jesus' healing power and His compassion for marginalized people. The two females in this story ran parallel lives until the day that Jesus came to town. The day the little girl was born must have brought great joy to Jairus and his family twelve years earlier. Jairus was a religious man, obviously respected in the community, which is shown by his upfront request to have Jesus come to his home to heal his daughter. At the time when this little girl came into the world, the woman with the hemorrhage began her long journey on her desperate reach toward her last hope, Jesus. Twelve years was a long time to be struggling with a bleeding issue, which would have marginalized her in the ceremonial world of the Jews as "unclean" in everyday social settings. After twelve long years of seeking help in every possible form, it is understandable how desperate she would have been. She was so desperate that she was willing to go against the social taboo of being in a crowd of people even though she was "unclean" in order to reach out and touch Jesus' garment in hopes of being healed.

In the end, Jesus did heal her, but not without correcting her theology. While she placed all her hope in touching his garment, as if his clothes held some special force that could be invoked by her grasping reach, He helped her to see that it was her faith that so moved the heart of God to heal her. This is an important point for all of us to recognize. Faith is living as if something unseen and unrealized is actually at work. When your faith is put in God, it means to lean your full weight on Him, as if there is no other lifeline. The Bible describes it this way: "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). It also says that without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). Jesus thought that is was important for her to understand that she was healed by reaching out to the right Person, not because of her superstitious beliefs.

Now that the woman was healed and made clean, it was time for Jesus to turn his attention to the original request that brought Him on the journey to begin with, Jairus' daughter. She was sick when Jairus went to implore Jesus to come heal her. But in this delay, she died, and the report came to Jairus that all hope for healing was gone. Jesus, though, encouraged Jairus to have faith and believe that He could not only heal a sick daughter, but that He could also bring her back to life. The Gospel records other incidents where Jesus raised people back to life: the widow's son (Luke 7:13-15) and Lazarus (John 11:43-44). These important accounts were recorded so that we could believe and have life that is truly life in Jesus. Saint John put it this way: "Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 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).

How does this story contribute to our understanding of Jesus and the role of humans as we seek to have relationship with Him? We learn that Jesus is God because He has power to heal and to raise the dead. While magicians and charlatans could conjure up evil powers to perform signs and wonders, no one but God has the authority to bring people back from the dead. It is clear from this account that the Gospel writer is making a case for Jesus' divinity and authority. Our response, then, is will we believe and surrender to His divinity and authority in our own lives? Will we come to Him as the One who said that He is the way, the truth and the LIFE (John 14:6)? Or will we try to find life on our own terms, pursuing a little bit of religion to satisfy our guilty conscience? Obviously, the Gospel writers went to great lengths to provide enough information about Jesus to convince us of His rightful place as King and Lord of our lives. May our search for His leadership in our lives be as desperate and as focused as that of Jairus and the woman with the bleeding issue.

As I type, I am reminded of a recent incident that has left me desperate for Jesus to be in control of my life and to experience His lordship over my knee-jerk reaction to defend myself. I was criticized for not doing part of my job well. At first I wanted to defend myself and prove my worth to others.

But after taking a deep breath, I turned to Jesus and silently asked Him what He wanted me to learn in this situation. I still don't know what that is, but I trust that He will help me to let Him be Lord of my life so that I don't have to rely on my accomplishments or my self-defense to prop up my ego. Instead of taking matters into my own hands and trying to find life in my own sense of self-righteousness, I can rely on Him, leaning my full weight on His perfection. I can learn from people's criticism and solicit feedback so that I can learn and grow. We are all a work in progress!

Reflection Questions

1. How do you feel when you consider the great compassion that Jesus had for the two women who were in need? What needs do you have that you can talk to Him about today? How does knowing His compassion for you encourage your approach to Him?

2. In both passages, Jesus was highlighted as One who has ultimate power. In the New Testament lesson, He became poor to bring us to His heavenly riches and in the Gospel lesson, He was able to heal and raise the dead. When you look at your life and the obstacles that seem to get you down, how does knowing that Christ has ultimate power influence your walk of faith? Sometimes, we are discouraged because we do not see Him using His power to do what we think He should do on our behalf. But take a few moments and ask Him to help you to see where He wants to exercise His authority in your life. See if in this next week your heart might be willing to desperately seek out His lordship in your life as you come up against obstacles and discouragement.

3. The Bible says to pray without ceasing (1 Thess 5:17) regardless of the circumstances. How hard do you think the woman in this story prayed for help? Since she had nowhere else to turn it's easy to imagine that she was very persistent in her calling upon God for help. Certainly, God allowed these dire circumstances in the woman's life in order to bring her to faith in the Lord Jesus for the forgiveness of her sins. Perhaps the woman was always faithful to pray, even before she became afflicted with the disease. Jairus, too, was a religious man, yet he lost his little daughter to a terrible illness. He knew where to turn when life got out of control. He desperately searched for Jesus, the Son of God and the rightful Lord of the universe. These two individuals are pictures of desperate hearts seeking God's help.

How bad do things have to get before we pray? Regardless of our circumstances**, God has called usnot to wait until troubles come our way, but to be faithful and pray in order to obey.** This

includes praying not only about our needs but also for the needs of others.

What are some practical ways that we may improve our level of persistence in prayer? Here are some methods that have worked for me, although they may not be suitable for everyone.

A. Write your prayer requests down on a 3×5 card. Carry this with you and as you find time pray throughout the day. It's helpful to categorize your requests, such as "Healing" or "Come to Faith in Jesus."

B. A very easy way to remember to pray for a very short list of people is to assign each of them to one finger, I call these "finger prayers." If you want to go one step further, meet with one of them and when you pray with them the first time have them hold that particular finger and tell them that this will help you to pray for them.

C. Consider the concept of constructing a kind of "prayer maze" in your head by assigning the people for whom you are praying to a geographical map of where they are located. For example, you could begin with praying for people in your home town, then move on to prayers for those located in the western part of your state, then to the north, east, and so on. This has proven very helpful to me since many times I pray for people during my daily exercise where I would not have access to cards on which I had listed prayer requests.

D. Finally, pray! Ask God to show you ways to improve your prayer life. In a previous edition of Mass Notes we discussed Luke 16:1-13. The application of this text was that God has called us to use our talents and ingenuity in order to lead people to the knowledge of Jesus Christ. Pray and ask God to energize your prayer life through the use of your time, talents, and materials possessions. This includes using our technological devices like smart phones and computers.

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 06-28-2020



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we a little bit about the cost of being a disciple of Jesus. We will see how God empowers us by resting in His omnipotent power as well as providing us with reminders of His marvelous grace by looking back to our baptism.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The context of the reading is more strange and mysterious goings on of Elijah's replacement, Elisha. Today's reading is just after Elisha's miraculous replenishment of the widow's oil (2 Kings 4:1 – 7). In the reading, we see yet another of Elijah's great miracles, the birth of a child to a childless Shunammite woman whose husband was very old. This was in repayment to her for the many kindnesses that she had done for him (2 Kings 4:1 – 13). We know from the text that follows, this miracle child would later die and be miraculously resurrected through another miracle (2 Kings 4:32 – 35).

First Reading:

2 Kings 4:8-11 NAS95 8 Now there came a day when Elisha passed over to Shunem, where there was a prominent woman, and she persuaded him to eat food. And so it was, as often as he passed by, he turned in there to eat food. 9 She said to her husband, "Behold now, I perceive that this is a holy man of God passing by us continually. 10 "Please, let us make a little walled upper chamber and let us set a bed for him there, and a table and a chair and a lampstand; and it shall be, when he comes to us, that he can turn in there." 11 One day he came there and turned in to the upper chamber and rested.

2 Kings 4:14-16 NAS95 14 So he said, "What then is to be done for her?" And Gehazi answered, "Truly she has no son and her husband is old." 15 He said, "Call her." When he had called her, she stood in the doorway. 16 Then he said, "At this season next year you will embrace a son." And she said, "No, my lord, O man of God, do not lie to your maidservant."

Omitted: 2Ki 4:17 The woman conceived and bore a son at that season the next year, as Elisha had said to her.

Gehazi was Elisha's attendant, although his motives may not have been entirely pure towards the Shunammite woman, pointed out to Elijah her desire for a son. Perhaps Gehazi though that he would supplant the woman's elderly husband. Instead, God brought about a miracle reminiscent of the birth of Isaac to Abraham.

Th big idea here is that God is a God of miracles. God sees the larger picture and fills people's needs even without their asking. Although God does desire for us to ask to fill our needs (James 4:2), He is able to go above and beyond to provide even the things which we don't ask for because we think that they are too big for God to provide. This helps us to persist through times of persecution and suffering. We can be thankful to God for giving us these vivid reminders through the scriptural writings of those believers who went before us.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The context of the reading from Romans in Paul's teaching on a believer's unity with God through Christ.

Second Reading:

Romans 6:3-4 NAS95 3 Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? 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.

Omitted: Romans 6:5-7 NAS95 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, 6 knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; 7 for he who has died is freed from sin.

Romans 6:8-11 NAS95 8 Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, 9 knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. 10 For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. 11 Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

In the reading, we learn much about the Christian life. We identify with Christ through our water baptism (v. 3). We see a contrast between the old self (v. 6), and our new self who is no longer a slave to sin (v. 6b). This fundamental transformation is brought about through the conversion of our soul. Our dead soul was symbolically buried with Christ at our baptism (v. 3), while our new self came to life when we became united to Christ through faith (v. 8, Ephesians 2:8-9). The big idea is that as believers we are united with Jesus. Our lost souls were united in Jesus' death for us. Then we were united with Jesus and given a new soul through His resurrection from the dead. These truths are vividly expressed through the act of water baptism which symbolizes a believer's death to the world and resurrection to the newness of life through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Understand our identity in Christ, and holding to it helps us to persist during times when we are persecuted for our faith. As we move to the Gospel reading we will learn more about the promised persecution of believers in Jesus. We can hold onto God's promises and remember that He is a God of miracles even while facing challenges brought about by our faith.

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

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The context of the reading from Matthew is Jesus' private message to the twelve disciples named individually by name (Matthew 10:2-4). The chapter opened with Jesus sending the disciples on a missionary journey with very specific instruction to bring nothing with them and to expect persecution. This first mission was specifically to the Jews, they were to "Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (vv. 5-6). Jesus sent them out as "sheep among wolves," to be "wise as serpents," "innocent as doves," and to "beware of men" who would persecute them (vv. 16 – 21). They were not to fear them and Jesus reminded them that "even the hairs of the head were numbered" (vv. 26, 30). Jesus' instruction in this preface to today's reading extended not only to the immediate context of His disciple's immediate journey, but also as instructions for all believers going out into the world to spread the Gospel message. "I say to you, you will not have gone through all of the towns of Israel before the Son on Man comes" (v. 23).

All our longtime readers will understand, the addition of the two verses before today's reading is to provide the fuller context of the reading. As you read, take special note of repeated words, phrases, and patterns in the text.

Gospel Reading:

Verses before today's reading:

Matthew 10:34-36 NAS95 34 "Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. 35 For I came to SET A MAN AGAINST HIS FATHER, AND A DAUGHTER AGAINST HER MOTHER, AND A DAUGHTER-IN-LAW AGAINST HER MOTHER-IN-LAW; 36 and A MAN'S ENEMIES WILL BE THE MEMBERS OF HIS HOUSEHOLD.

Today's Reading Matthew 10:37-42 NAS95 37 "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. 38 And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. 39 He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it. 40 He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me. 41 He who receives a prophet in the name of a

prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. 42 And whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you, he shall not lose his reward."

The reading is filled with multiple repeats of certain phrases, and the use of a literary technique called parallelism. In the first case, we see the phrase "not worthy of Me" or just the word "Me" repeated multiple times in verses 37 – 40. I counted a total of eight repeats of the word "Me" and three of the phrase "not worthy of Me." The latter condition, literary parallelism, occurs throughout the reading. Both literary techniques are used to bring attention to the big ideas in the text, the conflict arising from one's choice to follow Jesus and the rewards of doing so. We see,

"Jesus brought not peace / but a sword."

"Jesus pits man / against father."

And, "Daughter / against mother," "daughter in law against mother" (imagine that!).

"He who loves their father or mother more than Me / is not worthy of Me."

And, "Loves son or daughter more than Me / not worthy of Me."

A person "Not willing to carry one's cross / is not worthy of Me."

"People receive your Gospel message / receives Me."

The reward for persisting in all the conflicts that Jesus warned us about, are the rewards of a prophet (meaning anyone who carries Jesus' message), and a righteous man (meaning all believers) "vv. 41 – 42), eternal rewards which shall never be taken away "v. 42c).

What does it mean to take up one's cross, follow Jesus and persist during persecution (v. 38)? I remember back in my childhood while attending catechism classes how I was taught about the burden of carrying one's cross. The context of this teaching, as I remember it, was more about continuing a grueling journey of self-sacrifice rather than the big idea presented by Jesus in the reading. Here Jesus presented the concept of making hard choices through God's empowerment of us to oppose the worldly kingdom in favor of following Him and presenting His message to a God rejecting universe. Jesus is clear that these choices could even include forsaking one's own family in order to follow what Jesus is calling one to do. As followers of Jesus we understand that carrying one's cross for Christ is joyful, not the drudgery I imagined from the picture portrayed in my catechism classes. Jesus said just a few verses later, "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. Mt 11:30 "For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:29-30). The bottom line of the reading is that as believers in Jesus we must expect persecution and make the hard choices that God calls us to do.

There is a popular song from the 70's by Rupert Holmes named "Him" in which the chorus line says, "Him him him, what's she gonna do about him?" The meaning of the song is **far** different than our spiritual relationship with God. However, if you are someone like me whose mind is often filled with repeating chorus lines, we do have to ask ourselves the question. Him him him, what are **we** going to do about him? Jesus calls us to decide what to do about **Him**. It's Him or it's me. Serving God or serving self. This is a conscious step of faith one must make. As believers, we rejoice in the fact that regardless of how we may feel from day to day, our final judgment is not guilty. Jesus has borne our sins on the cross forever. He bore the penalty of our sin by suffering in our place, something that only the perfect sinless Son of God could do. We cannot increase the burden of personal cross and add anything to what Jesus completed for us through His carrying of the cross once and for all.

Reflection Questions

1. As you contemplate the story of Elijah's miracle from the first reading, what are one or two things for which you would like to ask God? Share these with a another believer and ask them to pray that God would bring them about or a change in circumstances.

2. What is your perspective on carrying your cross? In what ways does understanding Jesus' promise of persecution help you in this regard?

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_06-28-2020Download

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 06-30-2019



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. A key verse this week that links all three readings together is in the second reading from Galatians, "For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please" (Galatians 5:17). We desire to accomplish great things for God, but our flesh works against us. When we cooperate with our carnal, fleshly desires we may not achieve the full potential that God has for us. We will see how these forces rage among the people in all three of today's readings.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The context of the first reading from First Kings is just before the appointment of Nimshi as the King of the Northern tribes of Israel and the replacement of Elijah the prophet by Elisha. Elijah, the great prophet of God, had just killed the prophets of Baal after the great contest at Mount Carmel. When King Ahab's evil wife Jezebel found out about the slaying of the prophets she set out to kill Elijah (1

Kings 19:2). This caused Elijah to flee and he came to believe that he was the only believer left in the entire kingdom. Elijah said, "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars and killed Your prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away" (1 Kings 19:10). God replied as we see in today's reading and corrected his false assumption.

First Reading:

> *1 Kings 19:16-21 NAS95 16 and Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint king over Israel; and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place. 17 "It shall come about, the one who escapes from the sword of Hazael, Jehu shall put to death, and the one who escapes from the sword of Jehu, Elisha shall put to death. 18 "Yet I will leave 7,000 in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal and every mouth that has not kissed him." 19 So he departed from there and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, while he was plowing with twelve pairs of oxen before him, and he with the twelfth. And Elijah passed over to him and threw his mantle on him. 20 He left the oxen and ran after Elijah and said, "Please let me kiss my father and my mother, then I will follow you." And he said to him, "Go back again, for what have I done to you?" 21 So he returned from following him, and took the pair of oxen and sacrificed them and boiled their flesh with the implements of the oxen, and gave it to the people and they ate. Then he arose and followed Elijah and ministered to him.*

God gave Elijah specific guidance to appoint Jehu as the king of Israel and to anoint Elisha as his own successor (v. 16). God told Elijah that he wasn't the only believer left and that He had 7,000 true believers left in the kingdom (v. 18). Next, Elijah went and found Elisha out working and placed his prophet mantle (clothing) on him. When Elisha wavered about immediately accepting this responsibility Elijah told him in effect that to forsake this appointment would be an affront to God (v. 20). So Elisha accepted his new position and made a traditional sacrifice to confirm the "covenant" made between him and God to fulfill the prophecy given to Elijah.

The reading points out just how bad conditions had become in Israel such that Elijah believed that he was the only believer left alive. However, it is interesting that while 7,000 believers remained, even that was a very low number in view of the large size of the nation. Evidently most of the people had succumbed to the evil pagan worship practices memorialized in the Bible by King Jeroboam the son of Nabat who is recorded as a standard of evil. We see that standard mentioned earlier in First Kings. "For he walked in all the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat and in his sins which he made Israel sin, provoking the LORD God of Israel with their idols" (1 Kings 16:26).

The big idea in the reading is regarding the supreme sovereignty of God. Even when the great prophet in the entire world felt that all hope was lost, God continued making plans for the future of

the kingdom and reminding him of His omniscient and long-term view. In our age we can look to this passage to be reminded that God has our best interests in mind, is establishing future plans for us as well as all believers, and even when we feel totally spiritually alone our sovereign Father is superintending the circumstances for His glory and our best interests.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The context of the reading from Galatians is Saint Paul's teaching on the freedom believers possess in Christ as contrasted to the bondage that the false teachers were imposing upon the people by instructing them that they must obey the Mosaic Law. Paul explains further in the reading the battle between a believer's spirit and their flesh.

Second Reading:

> *Galatians 5:1 NAS95 1 It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.*
>
> *Galatians 5:13-18 NAS95 13 For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. 14 For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." 15 But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another. 16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. 17 For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.*

Paul reminded the believers in Galatia of their overarching purpose by quoting from the Mosaic Law in Leviticus 19:18: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." He cautioned them not to use their freedom in Christ to take advantage of their "neighbors." The Jews by that time had come to understand their neighbor in a very narrow sense such that it only included their fellow countrymen. Jesus had earlier corrected this false teaching in Luke Chapter 10. There Jesus explained the meaning of "neighbor" by telling them the parable of the Good Samaritan. Jesus explained to His disciples that, of all the people who passed by the man who had fallen at the hands of robbers, the only one who acted as a true neighbor as intended by God in Leviticus 19:18 was "The one who showed mercy toward him" (Luke 10:37). This is extremely important in this context because the Epistle to the Galatians was directed at the false teachers who taught that in order for people to be saved they must obey the constraints of the Mosaic Law making them, in effect, proselyte Jews. Paul and Jesus taught something quite different, that the neighborhood of God included anyone who was in need. Our true family includes those who have come to the Father through faith in the Son (John

3:16). Therefore, instead of trying to follow all of the contours of the Mosaic law, one would fulfill the spirit of the law by being a loving person. The only way a person can be truly loving (self-sacrificing and honoring of others above self) is if their heart is surrendered to God and His Spirit is now in control of the individual. The difference between someone who tries really hard to be a good person and one who is a Christian, is the power of the Holy Spirit alive in one's heart. The Holy Spirit is God's evidence that His life is inside a believer. While a believer is a work in progress and will not be perfect in this life, a fundamental change has taken place when we surrender ourselves to God through Christ. A new relationship has begun, and we are under the influence of God's Spirit, which transforms us. We begin to walk in step with the values of God's Spirit. And since God is love, it makes sense that He teaches us how to be more loving. This is not a matter of self-effort, but a growth in the life of God who makes His home in our hearts. Paul was clear that "*if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law*" (v. 18).

One wonders if at times Paul felt marginalized like Elijah as we discussed in the first reading where the prophet had fled from evil Jezebel's murderous plot. Paul, surrounded by false teachers that plotted to drag believers into the strictures of Jewish legalism, expressed God's prophetic word regarding the freedom that was to be found only through faith in Jesus Christ.

In our lives we must ask ourselves in what ways are we attempting to work out our own salvation through obedience to some form of religious law. It's hard not to notice those in our neighborhoods who never seem to leave their houses on Sunday morning to go to church. Do we hold to a false belief system that we are a pretty good person because we have faithfully attended Mass on Sundays and holy days that we are somehow going to be set apart from others who have not so zealously obeyed the commandments of the church? When we place our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins we have moved from darkness into light (1 Peter 2:9). The difference between a person that has truly trusted in Jesus versus the one that is relying upon their own works for salvation is subtle but very real as Jesus explained to Nicodemus. In John Chapter 3 Nicodemus, a legalistic Jew from the group known as the Pharisees, was a Rabbi who came to Jesus at night for fear of the Jews (John 3:2). Jesus explained to Nicodemus how he could only enter the kingdom of heaven through faith in Him. In one of the most important verses in the entire Bible Jesus told him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). Jesus went on to explain to him that in addition to the obvious necessity of physical birth, something much less obvious was necessary. In order to become a citizen of heaven one must be born spiritually through faith in God's Son. He told Nicodemus, "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. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him." (John 3:16-17).

If you are struggling with understanding the true motives of your heart, the Scripture says that you should call out to God in prayer. Paul said, "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; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation" (Romans 10:9-10). As we move to the final reading this week, take a moment to affirm your trust in

the Lord Jesus Christ.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The context of the reading is Luke's recording of the beginning of the end of Jesus' earthly life just before he gave His life for us on the cross at Calvary. Earlier the disciples had been arguing over who among them was the greatest. Jesus then presented them with a child and told them, "Whoever receives this child in My name receives Me, and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me; for the one who is least among all of you, this is the one who is great" (Luke 9:48). He then corrected His disciples who had rebuked someone for casting out demons in the name of Jesus, saying "Do not hinder him; for he who is not against you is for you" (v. 50). This hints at some of the same tension that Paul was indicating in the second reading between the strict followers of the Law and those that followed it less closely or held to other religious traditions. Nowhere was this tension more evident than in the region of Samaria where the people were held in contempt by the Jewish legalists. The Samaritans were considered a half breed people since they had been overtaken by the Assyrian Empire during the fall of the Northern Kingdom in 722 BC. Interestingly, Jesus turned to this despised group for help in making the preparations for the celebration of His last Passover feast. This was the Passover after which the true Lamb of God would be sacrificed for the sins of the world.

Gospel Reading:

> *Luke 9:51-62 NAS95 51 When the days were approaching for His ascension, He was determined to go to Jerusalem; 52 and He sent messengers on ahead of Him, and they went and entered a village of the Samaritans to make arrangements for Him. 53 But they did not receive Him, because He was traveling toward Jerusalem. 54 When His disciples James and John saw this, they said, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" 55 But He turned and rebuked them, and said, "You do not know what kind of spirit you are of; 56 for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." And they went on to another village. 57 As they were going along the road, someone said to Him, "I will follow You wherever You go." 58 And Jesus said to him, "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." 59 And He said to another, "Follow Me." But he said, "Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father." 60 But He said to him, "Allow the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God." 61 Another also said, "I will follow You, Lord; but first permit me to say good-bye to those at home." 62 But Jesus said to him, "No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."*

We see in the reading that the Samaritans didn't welcome Jesus' disciple's efforts in making the arrangements for the Passover feast even though Jesus had sent messengers ahead of time to them

(vv. 52-53). Instead, they were forced to travel onto another village, one which was very likely outside the constraints of Samaritan beliefs. When James and John, named by Jesus the "Sons of Thunder" (Mark 3:17), were confronted with the rejection of their efforts they showed their passion and love for Jesus by asking Him whether they should command fire to come down from the sky and destroy the Samaritans (v. 54). The disciples were familiar with how Elijah had commanded fire to come down from the sky to consume the sacrifice during the contest with the prophets of Baal, but now they were asking not to burn already dead cattle but rather living people! Jesus quickly corrected their false thinking and reminded them that He didn't come to "*destroy men's lives, but to save them*" (v. 56). This is reminiscent of what we read in our discussion of the second reading from John 3:17 where Jesus said, "For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him." As the reading progressed, Jesus taught His disciples about true discipleship and answering the calling of God. A true disciple would have to be willing to not only forsake their comfortable home (v. 58) but also to forsake their family in order to follow Him (v. 59). Here we see a clear parallel with Elisha's initial response to God's call through Elijah that we read about in the first reading.

As believers in the Lord Jesus we are called to forsake the things which hold us back to true obedience of the Lord Jesus. As we saw in the first reading, when God places a calling upon our lives we are to respond in obedience. Our answer must be to forsake the things which may hold us back, whether they be family, as we saw in the Gospel reading, or religious practices as we saw in the second. Like Elisha, even if in our humanness we hesitate for a moment while we count the cost of our obedience, we are called to respond in faith by following the directives given to us by God. As a first step of belief we are called to forsake the false understanding that we are saved from our good works and rather seeing that our deeds flow from our relationship with God. As we enter into God's invisible spiritual kingdom, the "kingdom of heaven" that Jesus explained to Nicodemus in John 3:3, we participate through God's power, as Paul said in the reading from Galatians, being led by the Spirit. At times although we too may desire to command fire down from heaven to consume our adversaries, Jesus calls us to a higher standard by recognizing these people as our "neighbors." This battle will continue for the duration of our life here on earth, "For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please" (Galatians 5:17).

Reflection Questions

1. Most Christians are not known for their love. Instead, the world characterizes us as judgmental, harsh, and angry. Who are the "neighbors" that you regularly interact with? What would it look like for you to walk in the Spirit and change this characterization with your "neighbor?"

2. Jesus illustrated true discipleship as a relationship with Him that prioritized Him above all other priorities. In what ways have you made intentional decisions to orient your life around His Kingdom principles? What has been the cost of discipleship for you? Are there any new ways that He is asking you to follow Him?

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_06-30-2019.pdfDownload

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 07-01-2018



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we open with Saint Paul's letter to the Corinthian believers, encouraging them to be generous with their suffering brothers and sisters in Christ. The Gospel lesson tells the story of Jesus healing two marginalized people: a little girl who died and a woman who suffered with bleeding for many years. In both passages, we see that the heart of God is tender toward those who are suffering.

The first reading is from the Apocrypha. Our study will begin with the second reading, which is from Saint Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

On his third missionary journey, Saint Paul encouraged Gentile Christians to help their struggling brothers and sisters in Christ who were impacted by a severe famine in Jerusalem (see Acts 24:17). In this part of his letter to the believers in Corinth, he is urging them to excel at being financially

generous and to complete their pledge of support to those who are in physical need. In the first part of this section, he commends them for leading the way in their faith and conduct. He then asks them to become leaders in the area of generosity. So it is not only important to want to give, but to follow through and actually sacrifice on behalf of others. He calls the act of giving a "gracious work" (v. 7). He then ties in this "gracious work" with the sacrifice that Christ made on our behalf, which is the motivating force behind the compassionate giving that should characterize Christians.

Second Reading:

(Verses 8, 10, and 11 which were omitted from the reading were included in order to provide the full context and meaning).

> *2 Corinthians 8:7-15 NAS95 7 "But just as you abound in everything, in faith and utterance and knowledge and in all earnestness and in the love we inspired in you, see that you abound in this gracious work also. 8 I am not speaking this as a command, but as proving through the earnestness of others the sincerity of your love also. 9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich. 10 I give my opinion in this matter, for this is to your advantage, who were the first to begin a year ago not only to do this, but also to desire to do it. 11 But now finish doing it also, so that just as there was the readiness to desire it, so there may be also the completion of it by your ability. 12 For if the readiness is present, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have. 13 For this is not for the ease of others and for your affliction, but by way of equality– 14 at this present time your abundance being a supply for their need, so that their abundance also may become a supply for your need, that there may be equality; 15 as it is written, "HE WHO gathered MUCH DID NOT HAVE TOO MUCH, AND HE WHO gathered LITTLE HAD NO LACK."*

Saint Paul points out a few key principles to encourage the Corinthian believers to follow through on their pledge to provide financial relief to the starving Christians in Jerusalem. Paul challenged the Corinthians to be generous in giving the things that God had so generously provided, saying that they "abound in everything" else (v. 7), so why would generosity not be part of their reputation as well? This calling to give was not a command but rather a challenge that Paul provided to reveal the true "sincerity of [their] love" (v. 8b). He is clear that this calling to gracious giving is his opinion, but from what we know about the other times that Paul has given his personal views it is a sound biblical principle if not an outright command.

Paul went on to explain how Jesus was the example of sacrificial giving by saying, "though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich" (v. 9b –ff). Paul's reasoning is twofold. One, if the Corinthians give during their times of prosperity they can count upon other Christians to give to them during their own time of need. The most basic decency of a human citizen of the world is in giving to others in need out of one's abundance.

Second, sacrificial giving is evidence of their true calling to serve God. Although a seed must of course be initially planted, it doesn't go far without proper watering and continued nurturing. Paul admonished the Corinthians not to just begin the good work of giving, but to carry it to completion (v. 11). He closed with a quote from Exodus 16:18, a passage in which Moses explained how through God's sovereign control everyone gathered manna in the exact amount that they required. In the new economy of God after the Exodus God called the Hebrews and all people subsequent to them to act as His agent in distributing goods evenly from each person's excess to fill other people's needs.

What was happening back then historically can be a lesson to us in our own day and age. First, he calls them to recognize the connectedness of the universal church. He challenged them to step up to the plate and become an example for the other churches, who were already contributing generously to the cause of helping their brothers and sisters. Paul wrote to this group of believers in a previous letter about the connectedness of the church by calling Christians the "body of Christ". In explaining how each believer is interdependent, he said, "And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it" (1 Corinthians 12:26). What happens to one believer (good or bad) impacts the rest of the body. This interconnectedness with the universal church should awaken our sensitivity to others around us; those we know and even those we do not know. Being others-oriented can release us from the tyranny of self-absorption, which is more oppressive than we often recognize. God's structure of connecting us to the larger body of Christ and giving us an awareness of others in need is a blessing to our spiritual growth and maturity.

The second main point that Paul makes about giving in this passage is that the motive behind the giving is more important than the actual amount of the gift. He emphasizes that generous giving can be an outward display of sincerity of heart and love for others. The supreme example of generous giving is Jesus Christ Himself. Though Christ had all of the privileges of heaven, He gave up His rightful place of authority and riches to submit Himself to the poverty of this world. One of the early hymns of the church focused on Christ's humility for our sake and reinforces the theme of why we should be generous to others. It is a way that we can show the world who Jesus is. The following Scripture helps us to understand this more.

> *Philippians 2:5-11 NAS95 5 "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, 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. 9 For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."*

Another important and encouraging principle that Saint Paul gives in regard to giving is that God entrusts us with different amounts of financial means so that we might steward resources in a way that promotes equality and unity in the body of Christ. Some parts of our world have very little in regard to material resources. These ones who are not rich in the world's eyes are often rich in other resources, such as faith, relationships and having an eternal perspective. Paul says that their richness can supply what a materially wealthy community of believers might not have. And a materially wealthy community can benefit those who are impoverished by giving sacrificially and providing a sense of unity among the believers (see also 1 Timothy 6:11-19). So while God could magically provide for all of the needs in the world, He does not override the will of believers, but instead, trusts us to live in the power of Christ so that we participate in this "gracious work". We have received grace and so we give graciously to others out of the abundance of what Christ has given to us. This passage encourages all believers to consider our part in being the hands and feet of Christ.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading is from Mark where we will see the story of a miraculous healing.

Gospel Reading:

> *Mark 5:21-43 NAS95 21 When Jesus had crossed over again in the boat to the other side, a large crowd gathered around Him; and so He stayed by the seashore. 22 One of the synagogue officials named Jairus came up, and on seeing Him, fell at His feet 23 and implored Him earnestly, saying, "My little daughter is at the point of death; please come and lay Your hands on her, so that she will get well and live." 24 And He went off with him; and a large crowd was following Him and pressing in on Him. 25 A woman who had had a hemorrhage for twelve years, 26 and had endured much at the hands of many physicians, and had spent all that she had and was not helped at all, but rather had grown worse– 27 after hearing about Jesus, she came up in the crowd behind Him and touched His cloak. 28 For she thought, "If I just touch His garments, I will get well." 29 Immediately the flow of her blood was dried up; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her affliction. 30 Immediately Jesus, perceiving in Himself that the power proceeding from Him had gone forth, turned around in the crowd and said, "Who touched My garments?" 31 And His disciples said to Him, "You see the crowd pressing in on You, and You say, 'Who touched Me?'" 32 And He looked around to see the woman who had done this. 33 But the woman fearing and trembling, aware of what had happened to her, came and fell down before Him and told Him the whole truth. 34 And He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace and be healed of your affliction." 35 While He was still speaking, they came from the house of the synagogue official, saying, "Your daughter has died; why trouble the Teacher anymore?" 36 But Jesus, overhearing what was being spoken, said to the synagogue official, "Do not be afraid any longer, only believe." 37 And He allowed no one to accompany Him, except Peter and James and John the brother of James. 38 They came to the house of the synagogue official; and He saw a commotion, and people loudly weeping and wailing. 39 And entering in, He said to them, "Why make a commotion and weep? The child has not died, but is*

> *asleep." 40 They began laughing at Him. But putting them all out, He took along the child's father and mother and His own companions, and entered the room where the child was. 41 Taking the child by the hand, He said to her, "Talitha kum!" (which translated means, "Little girl, I say to you, get up!"). 42 Immediately the girl got up and began to walk, for she was twelve years old. And immediately they were completely astounded. 43 And He gave them strict orders that no one should know about this, and He said that something should be given her to eat.*

This is a powerful story of Jesus' healing power and His compassion for marginalized people. The two females in this story ran parallel lives until the day that Jesus came to town. The day the little girl was born must have brought great joy to Jairus and his family twelve years earlier. Jairus was a religious man, obviously respected in the community, which is shown by his upfront request to have Jesus come to his home to heal his daughter. At the time when this little girl came into the world, the woman with the hemorrhage began her long journey on her desperate reach toward her last hope, Jesus. Twelve years was a long time to be struggling with a bleeding issue, which would have marginalized her in the ceremonial world of the Jews as "unclean" in everyday social settings. After twelve long years of seeking help in every possible form, it is understandable how desperate she would have been. She was so desperate that she was willing to go against the social taboo of being in a crowd of people even though she was "unclean" in order to reach out and touch Jesus' garment in hopes of being healed.

In the end, Jesus did heal her, but not without correcting her theology. While she placed all her hope in touching his garment, as if his clothes held some special force that could be invoked by her grasping reach, He helped her to see that it was her faith that so moved the heart of God to heal her. This is an important point for all of us to recognize. Faith is living as if something unseen and unrealized is actually at work. When your faith is put in God, it means to lean your full weight on Him, as if there is no other lifeline. The Bible describes it this way: "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). It also says that without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). Jesus thought that is was important for her to understand that she was healed by reaching out to the right Person, not because of her superstitious beliefs.

Now that the woman was healed and made clean, it was time for Jesus to turn his attention to the original request that brought Him on the journey to begin with, Jairus' daughter. She was sick when Jairus went to implore Jesus to come heal her. But in this delay, she died, and the report came to Jairus that all hope for healing was gone. Jesus, though, encouraged Jairus to have faith and believe that He could not only heal a sick daughter, but that He could also bring her back to life. The Gospel records other incidents where Jesus raised people back to life: the widow's son (Luke 7:13-15) and Lazarus (John 11:43-44). These important accounts were recorded so that we could believe and have life that is truly life in Jesus. Saint John put it this way: "Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 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).

How does this story contribute to our understanding of Jesus and the role of humans as we seek to have relationship with Him? We learn that Jesus is God because He has power to heal and to raise the dead. While magicians and charlatans could conjure up evil powers to perform signs and wonders, no one but God has the authority to bring people back from the dead. It is clear from this account that the Gospel writer is making a case for Jesus' divinity and authority. Our response, then, is will we believe and surrender to His divinity and authority in our own lives? Will we come to Him as the One who said that He is the way, the truth and the LIFE (John 14:6)? Or will we try to find life on our own terms, pursuing a little bit of religion to satisfy our guilty conscience? Obviously, the Gospel writers went to great lengths to provide enough information about Jesus to convince us of His rightful place as King and Lord of our lives. May our search for His leadership in our lives be as desperate and as focused as that of Jairus and the woman with the bleeding issue.

As I type, I am reminded of a recent incident that has left me desperate for Jesus to be in control of my life and to experience His lordship over my knee-jerk reaction to defend myself. I was criticized for not doing part of my job well. At first I wanted to defend myself and prove my worth to others. But after taking a deep breath, I turned to Jesus and silently asked Him what He wanted me to learn in this situation. I still don't know what that is, but I trust that He will help me to let Him be Lord of my life so that I don't have to rely on my accomplishments or my self-defense to prop up my ego. Instead of taking matters into my own hands and trying to find life in my own sense of self-righteousness, I can rely on Him, leaning my full weight on His perfection. I can learn from people's criticism and solicit feedback so that I can learn and grow. We are all a work in progress!

Reflection Questions

1. How do you feel when you consider the great compassion that Jesus had for the two women who were in need? What needs do you have that you can talk to Him about today? How does knowing His compassion for you encourage your approach to Him?

2. In both passages, Jesus was highlighted as One who has ultimate power. In the New Testament lesson, He became poor to bring us to His heavenly riches and in the Gospel lesson, He was able to heal and raise the dead. When you look at your life and the obstacles that seem to get you down, how does knowing that Christ has ultimate power influence your walk of faith? Sometimes, we are discouraged because we do not see Him using His power to do what we think He should do on our behalf. But take a few moments and ask Him to help you to see where He wants to exercise His authority in your life. See if in this next week your heart might be willing to desperately seek out His lordship in your life as you come up against obstacles and discouragement.

3. The Bible says to pray without ceasing (1 Thess 5:17) regardless of the circumstances. How hard do you think the woman in this story prayed for help? Since she had nowhere else to turn it's easy to imagine that she was very persistent in her calling upon God for help. Certainly, God allowed these

dire circumstances in the woman's life in order to bring her to faith in the Lord Jesus for the forgiveness of her sins. Perhaps the woman was always faithful to pray, even before she became afflicted with the disease. Jairus, too, was a religious man, yet he lost his little daughter to a terrible illness. He knew where to turn when life got out of control. He desperately searched for Jesus, the Son of God and the rightful Lord of the universe. These two individuals are pictures of desperate hearts seeking God's help.

How bad do things have to get before we pray? Regardless of our circumstances**, God has called us not to wait until troubles come our way, but to be faithful and pray in order to obey.** This includes praying not only about our needs but also for the needs of others.

What are some practical ways that we may improve our level of persistence in prayer? Here are some methods that have worked for me, although they may not be suitable for everyone.

A. Write your prayer requests down on a 3×5 card. Carry this with you and as you find time pray throughout the day. It's helpful to categorize your requests, such as "Healing" or "Come to Faith in Jesus."

B. A very easy way to remember to pray for a very short list of people is to assign each of them to one finger, I call these "finger prayers." If you want to go one step further, meet with one of them and when you pray with them the first time have them hold that particular finger and tell them that this will help you to pray for them.

C. Consider the concept of constructing a kind of "prayer maze" in your head by assigning the people for whom you are praying to a geographical map of where they are located. For example, you could begin with praying for people in your home town, then move on to prayers for those located in the western part of your state, then to the north, east, and so on. This has proven very helpful to me since many times I pray for people during my daily exercise where I would not have access to cards on which I had listed prayer requests.

D. Finally, pray! Ask God to show you ways to improve your prayer life. In a previous edition of Mass Notes we discussed Luke 16:1-13. The application of this text was that God has called us

to use our talents and ingenuity in order to lead people to the knowledge of Jesus Christ. Pray and ask God to energize your prayer life through the use of your time, talents, and materials possessions. This includes using our technological devices like smart phones and computers.

Mass-Study-Notes-for-Sunday_07-01-2018.pdfDownload

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 7-02-2017



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we a little bit about the cost of being a disciple of Jesus. We will see how God empowers us by resting in His omnipotent power as well as providing us with reminders of His marvelous grace by looking back to our baptism.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The context of the reading is more strange and mysterious goings on of Elijah's replacement, Elisha. Today's reading is just after Elisha's miraculous replenishment of the widow's oil (2 Kings 4:1 – 7). In the reading, we see yet another of Elijah's great miracles, the birth of a child to a childless Shunammite woman whose husband was very old. This was in repayment to her for the many

kindnesses that she had done for him (2 Kings 4:1 – 13). We know from the text that follows, this miracle child would later die and be miraculously resurrected through another miracle (2 Kings 4:32 – 35).

First Reading:

2 Kings 4:8-11 NAS95 8 Now there came a day when Elisha passed over to Shunem, where there was a prominent woman, and she persuaded him to eat food. And so it was, as often as he passed by, he turned in there to eat food. 9 She said to her husband, "Behold now, I perceive that this is a holy man of God passing by us continually. 10 "Please, let us make a little walled upper chamber and let us set a bed for him there, and a table and a chair and a lampstand; and it shall be, when he comes to us, that he can turn in there." 11 One day he came there and turned in to the upper chamber and rested.

2 Kings 4:14-16 NAS95 14 So he said, "What then is to be done for her?" And Gehazi answered, "Truly she has no son and her husband is old." 15 He said, "Call her." When he had called her, she stood in the doorway. 16 Then he said, "At this season next year you will embrace a son." And she said, "No, my lord, O man of God, do not lie to your maidservant."

Omitted: 2Ki 4:17 The woman conceived and bore a son at that season the next year, as Elisha had said to her.

Gehazi was Elisha's attendant, although his motives may not have been entirely pure towards the Shunammite woman, pointed out to Elijah her desire for a son. Perhaps Gehazi though that he would supplant the woman's elderly husband. Instead, God brought about a miracle reminiscent of the birth of Isaac to Abraham.

Th big idea here is that God is a God of miracles. God sees the larger picture and fills people's needs even without their asking. Although God does desire for us to ask to fill our needs (James 4:2), He is able to go above and beyond to provide even the things which we don't ask for because we think that they are too big for God to provide. This helps us to persist through times of persecution and suffering. We can be thankful to God for giving us these vivid reminders through the scriptural writings of those believers who went before us.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The context of the reading from Romans in Paul's teaching on a believer's unity with God through Christ.

Second Reading:

Romans 6:3-4 NAS95 3 Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus

have been baptized into His death? 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.

Omitted: Romans 6:5-7 NAS95 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, 6 knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; 7 for he who has died is freed from sin.

Romans 6:8-11 NAS95 8 Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, 9 knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. 10 For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. 11 Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

In the reading, we learn much about the Christian life. We identify with Christ through our water baptism (v. 3). We see a contrast between the old self (v. 6), and our new self who is no longer a slave to sin (v. 6b). This fundamental transformation is brought about through the conversion of our soul. Our dead soul was symbolically buried with Christ at our baptism (v. 3), while our new self came to life when we became united to Christ through faith (v. 8, Ephesians 2:8-9). The big idea is that as believers we are united with Jesus. Our lost souls were united in Jesus' death for us. Then we were united with Jesus and given a new soul through His resurrection from the dead. These truths are vividly expressed through the act of water baptism which symbolizes a believer's death to the world and resurrection to the newness of life through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Understand our identity in Christ, and holding to it helps us to persist during times when we are persecuted for our faith. As we move to the Gospel reading we will learn more about the promised persecution of believers in Jesus. We can hold onto God's promises and remember that He is a God of miracles even while facing challenges brought about by our faith.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The context of the reading from Matthew is Jesus' private message to the twelve disciples named individually by name (Matthew 10:2-4). The chapter opened with Jesus sending the disciples on a missionary journey with very specific instruction to bring nothing with them and to expect persecution. This first mission was specifically to the Jews, they were to "Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (vv. 5-6). Jesus sent them out as "sheep among wolves," to be "wise as serpents," "innocent as doves," and to "beware of men" who would persecute them (vv. 16 – 21). They were not to fear them and Jesus reminded them that "even the hairs of the head were numbered" (vv. 26, 30). Jesus' instruction

in this preface to today's reading extended not only to the immediate context of His disciple's immediate journey, but also as instructions for all believers going out into the world to spread the Gospel message. "I say to you, you will not have gone through all of the towns of Israel before the Son on Man comes" (v. 23).

All our longtime readers will understand, the addition of the two verses before today's reading is to provide the fuller context of the reading. As you read, take special note of repeated words, phrases, and patterns in the text.

Gospel Reading:

Verses before today's reading:

Matthew 10:34-36 NAS95 34 "Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. 35 For I came to SET A MAN AGAINST HIS FATHER, AND A DAUGHTER AGAINST HER MOTHER, AND A DAUGHTER-IN-LAW AGAINST HER MOTHER-IN-LAW; 36 and A MAN'S ENEMIES WILL BE THE MEMBERS OF HIS HOUSEHOLD.

Today's Reading Matthew 10:37-42 NAS95 37 "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. 38 And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. 39 He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it. 40 He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me. 41 He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. 42 And whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you, he shall not lose his reward."

The reading is filled with multiple repeats of certain phrases, and the use of a literary technique called parallelism. In the first case, we see the phrase "not worthy of Me" or just the word "Me" repeated multiple times in verses 37 – 40. I counted a total of eight repeats of the word "Me" and three of the phrase "not worthy of Me." The latter condition, literary parallelism, occurs throughout the reading. Both literary techniques are used to bring attention to the big ideas in the text, the conflict arising from one's choice to follow Jesus and the rewards of doing so. We see,

"Jesus brought not peace / but a sword."

"Jesus pits man / against father."

And, "Daughter / against mother," "daughter in law against mother" (imagine that!).

"He who loves their father or mother more than Me / is not worthy of Me."

And, "Loves son or daughter more than Me / not worthy of Me."

A person "Not willing to carry one's cross / is not worthy of Me."

"People receive your Gospel message / receives Me."

The reward for persisting in all the conflicts that Jesus warned us about, are the rewards of a prophet (meaning anyone who carries Jesus' message), and a righteous man (meaning all believers) "vv. 41 – 42), eternal rewards which shall never be taken away "v. 42c).

What does it mean to take up one's cross, follow Jesus and persist during persecution (v. 38)? I remember back in my childhood while attending catechism classes how I was taught about the burden of carrying one's cross. The context of this teaching, as I remember it, was more about continuing a grueling journey of self-sacrifice rather than the big idea presented by Jesus in the reading. Here Jesus presented the concept of making hard choices through God's empowerment of us to oppose the worldly kingdom in favor of following Him and presenting His message to a God rejecting universe. Jesus is clear that these choices could even include forsaking one's own family in order to follow what Jesus is calling one to do. As followers of Jesus we understand that carrying one's cross for Christ is joyful, not the drudgery I imagined from the picture portrayed in my catechism classes. Jesus said just a few verses later, "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. Mt 11:30 "For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:29-30). The bottom line of the reading is that as believers in Jesus we must expect persecution and make the hard choices that God calls us to do.

There is a popular song from the 70's by Rupert Holmes named "Him" in which the chorus line says, "Him him him, what's she gonna do about him?" The meaning of the song is **far** different than our spiritual relationship with God. However, if you are someone like me whose mind is often filled with repeating chorus lines, we do have to ask ourselves the question. Him him him, what are **we** going to do about him? Jesus calls us to decide what to do about **Him**. It's Him or it's me. Serving God or serving self. This is a conscious step of faith one must make. As believers, we rejoice in the fact that regardless of how we may feel from day to day, our final judgment is not guilty. Jesus has borne our sins on the cross forever. He bore the penalty of our sin by suffering in our place, something that only the perfect sinless Son of God could do. We cannot increase the burden of personal cross and add anything to what Jesus completed for us through His carrying of the cross once and for all.

Reflection Questions

1. As you contemplate the story of Elijah's miracle from the first reading, what are one or two things for which you would like to ask God? Share these with a another believer and ask them to pray that God would bring them about or a change in circumstances.

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

2. What is your perspective on carrying your cross? In what ways does understanding Jesus' promise of persecution help you in this regard?

Mass-Study-Notes-for-Sunday_07-02-2017.pdfDownload