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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 148: 10/25/2026



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we open with the first reading from Moses' Book of Exodus, in which we see God's concern for widows, orphans, and the poor. Then we move to the second reading, a continuation of the study we began last week in 1 Thessalonians. We conclude with another of Jesus' discussions with the Jewish leaders from the Gospel of Saint Matthew, this time with the infamous Pharisees.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from Exodus 22. It is one of the first five Books of the Bible, known as the Pentateuch, and was written by Moses. The Book recounts God's sovereign raising up of Moses as a leader to shepherd the Israelites out of their captivity in Israel. The Book also chronicles the giving of the Law to Moses, including the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai. Whenever biblical texts use the term "Law," they mean the whole canon of Jewish Law, including the Ten Commandments and the several hundred other laws in the last four books of the Pentateuch: Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers,

and Deuteronomy. Chapter 20 contains the Ten Commandments and opens as follows. "Then God spoke all these words, saying, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." (Exodus 20:1-2). God, who calls Himself "I am" in verse one, meaning the "self-existent One," led the Israelites out of their bondage under the oppressive rule of the Pharaoh of Egypt through His ordained leader Moses. God gradually revealed the entire Canon of the Law to Moses during his wanderings in the desert.

Understanding today's reading requires some considerable insight into the cultural and religious milieu of Jews in the ancient Near East. Foreigners were not the only downtrodden class of people to whom God afforded special protection in the Law. In those days, three classes of people were as low in the socioeconomic strata as foreigners. These were widows, orphans, and the poor, though the first two certainly shared the characteristic of poverty. These groups of people had almost no rights in the secular kingdoms that surrounded Israel. However, throughout the Law, we find God's special protection for these groups. God's protection of the lower classes through the Law reveals something about His very nature. In the Book of Psalms, we see God's care for the poor. God says that He is "A father of the fatherless and a judge for the widows" (Psalms 68:5). The Psalmist said, "I know that the LORD will maintain the cause of the afflicted And justice for the poor" (Ps 140:12). "The LORD performs righteous deeds And judgments for all who are oppressed," the Psalmist said (Ps 103:6). God made special provisions for the protection of these classes of people throughout the Law. In Lev. 19:9–10, God protected strangers and the poor by providing for them through the gleanings in the corners of the fields. In Deut. 14:28–29, God provided special Laws for strangers, the fatherless, and widows. At the opening of his book, the prophet Isaiah called the Israelites to repent of their sin. God said, "Learn to do good; Seek justice, reprove the ruthless, defend the orphan, plead for the widow" (Isaiah 1:17). This admonition appears multiple times throughout the Old Testament and is, in fact, what James in the New Testament called "basic religion." He said, "Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world" (James 1:27).

As you read the first reading, try to imagine what it would be like to have absolutely nothing and no social standing in the ancient world. *Note: Verse 27 was included for context.*

First Reading:

> *Exodus 22:20-27 NAS95 20 "He who sacrifices to any god, other than to the LORD alone, shall be utterly destroyed. 21 "You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you*

> *were strangers in the land of Egypt. 22 "You shall not afflict any widow or orphan. 23 "If you afflict him at all, and if he does cry out to Me, I will surely hear his cry; 24 and My anger will be kindled, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless. 25 "If you lend money to My people, to the poor among you, you are not to act as a creditor to him; you shall not charge him interest. 26 "If you ever take your neighbor's cloak as a pledge, you are to return it to him before the sun sets, 27 for that is his only covering; it is his cloak for his body. What else shall he sleep in? And it shall come about that when he cries out to Me, I will hear him, for I am gracious.*

The reading opens in verse 20 with the often-repeated warning about idolatry. "He who sacrifices to any god, other than to the LORD alone, shall be utterly destroyed" (Exodus 20:20). In the next verse, God introduces new teaching on how to treat aliens. God says, "You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Exodus 20:21). Here, God gives a reason for treating foreigners properly: the Israelites were once foreigners under Pharaoh's rule.

In the reading, we see God's concern for widows (v. 22), orphans (v. 22), and the poor (v. 25). God said that He would hear the cries of the widows and the orphans and answer with judgment by allowing the people to be killed by their enemies with the sword (v. 24). This is something that was repeated over and over again throughout the Old Testament, especially in the era of the Judges. When times were good, the people would begin to oppress the lower classes, then God would allow an alien nation to overtake the people. Then they would repent, God would raise up a deliverer (for example, a judge like Gideon in Judges 6), the people would again return to prosperity, and the cycle would repeat. God's instruction not to oppress the poor continued in verses 26-27, as a neighbor took his neighbor's cloak as collateral for a loan. This person was so poor that they had nothing to pledge but their clothing. God knew this was a dire situation and provided a clear principle: fellow Israelites were not to take such essential items as collateral for loans. The principle is that when a poor neighbor is taken advantage of by being forced to pledge his essentials to survive, God will raise up a deliverer against the more prosperous man and bring judgment upon him for his unrighteous action. Instead, God said in Leviticus something that we shall study later in the Gospel lesson, "You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD" (Leviticus 19:18). Loving your neighbor, in the case of what God said about not taking your neighbor's cloak as a pledge, instead meant sharing in your abundance and that of the community.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

As we move on to the second reading, ask yourself what it means to act in full conviction of the Holy Spirit in response to the biblical precepts about serving Jesus and others. The Jews knew the Laws about not oppressing aliens, orphans, and the poor, yet they didn't practice what was preached. You may have heard the cute acronym "J-O-Y," which means to consider our lives in light of the hierarchy of Jesus, others, and you. As the teaching goes, we should consider Jesus first, then others, and finally ourselves. See what you can uncover from Saint Paul as you read his admonition on taking the Word to heart.

Second Reading:

> *5 for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. 6 You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, 7 so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. 8 For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything. 9 For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, 10 and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come. (1 Thessalonians 1:5-10)*

Paul told the Thessalonians how impressed he was with them because they didn't just do as he told them to ("word only," v. 5), but also carried out what he directed through the power of the Holy Spirit. Not only that, but they became examples to others (v. 7). The Thessalonians turned from the worship of idols, as was the custom of their culture, to the worship of the One True God (v. 9). Finally, Paul commended them for holding hope in the resurrection of the dead. When he said that Jesus "rescues us from the wrath to come" (v. 10), he meant the eternal punishment promised to unbelievers in hell, not some temporal deliverance or rapture (catching up) from their present circumstances. Later in the Book, Paul discusses how believers alive when Jesus returns will be united with him in the clouds (1 Thessalonians 4:17), which is the context of the book and movie *Left Behind* (we will cover that in a future lesson). Paul's key point to the Thessalonians was his commendation of them for living out their Christian lives in word and action, something the Sadducees and Pharisees in the Gospel narrative hadn't learned.

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Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

In the second reading, we saw Saint Paul's admonition to take the Word to heart and his commendation of the Thessalonians for doing so. In today's Gospel lesson, Jesus summarizes the Law into two key points that reveal the hypocrisy of the Pharisees' hearts, who didn't take the Word to heart. This lesson is another of Jesus' interactions with the Jewish ruling authorities during His inevitable journey to death at Calvary, this time with one of the Pharisees' best legal experts.

Gospel Reading:

> *34 But when the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered themselves together. 35 One of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, 36 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" 37 And He said to him, "'YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.' 38 This is the great and foremost commandment. 39 The second is like it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' 40 On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 22:34-40)*

First, a bit about the context. When Matthew says, "But when the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees," he refers to the story that just happened. Here, the Sadducees, who didn't believe in the resurrection of the dead, asked Jesus about a theoretical expansion of the Levitical Law known as Levirate Marriage. They asked Jesus about the relationship in the resurrection between a certain woman and the chain of husbands the Levirate Law afforded her. Remember that the Sadducees didn't believe in the resurrection, but they were just trying to trap Jesus. When they asked Jesus whose husband the woman would be in the resurrection after being married to seven different brothers, Jesus answered them as follows: *29 But Jesus answered and said to them, "You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God. 30 For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. 31 But regarding the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God: 32 'I AM THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, AND THE GOD OF ISAAC, AND THE GOD OF JACOB'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living." 33 When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at His teaching. (Matthew 22:29-33)*

The Sadducees' brief silence gave the Pharisees a chance to test Jesus themselves. They asked Him, "Which is the great commandment in the Law?" (v. 36), again addressing Him with the honorable title of Rabbi (teacher). When the Pharisees use the term "Law," they mean the whole of the Old Testament. During that era, rabbis frequently debated which elements of the Law carried the most weight and which could be given less weight or even discounted. Jesus' answer summarized the whole Canon of both the Law **and** the Prophetic writings. He answered them by quoting from the Levitical Law, "YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.' This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets" (vv. 38-40). Here, Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:5, or the "Shema," a phrase that religious Jews stated twice a day. He also quoted from Leviticus 19:18, which we mentioned in the discussion of the first reading.

Jesus says a true follower of God is a whole being, with a heart united in purpose (heart, soul, and mind), rather than compartmentalized theoretical knowledge that doesn't lead to action. Loving God naturally leads us to keep His commandments. Jesus said in John 14:23, "If anyone loves Me, he will obey my teaching. . . ." Saint John continued Jesus' connection between love and action when He said, "Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue, but with action and in truth" (1 John 3:18). And again, "We love, because He first loved us. If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also" (1 John 4:19-21).

This was the heart of the indictment against the Pharisees. They were a group about which it could be said, "do as I say, but not as I do," as the expression goes. Love demands concrete action, not just correct information about God. This means helping your neighbor when he needs it, not offering him a loan by taking his cloak as collateral, as we saw in the first reading. Loving your neighbor as yourself also means loving yourself as someone created in the image of God. This means caring for our bodies, spiritually and physically, as temples of the Holy Spirit.

Reflection Questions

1. As you journey through the week, what does it look like for you to have a heart united in love and action for God? In our global society, what "neighbor" is God placing on your heart to help with a gift that doesn't require a loan or collateral?

2. Spiritually, we are all as helpless as the orphans and widows of the ancient society. How do you respond to God's heart for you in your own spiritual poverty? What spiritual resources (see below) have you appropriated in your life? Which ones do you need to continue internalizing?

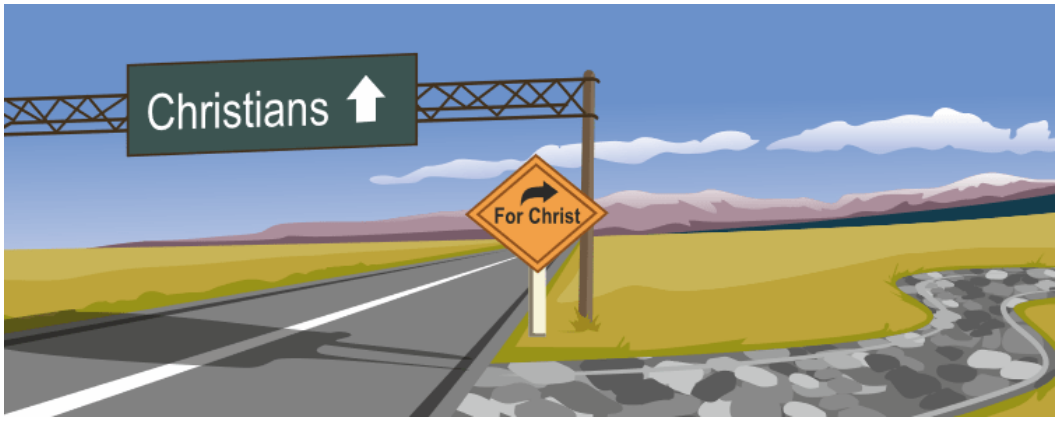
Spiritual Resources in Christ:

- I have been washed (1 Corinthians 6:11).
- I have been sanctified (set apart for special use) (1 Corinthians 6:11).
- I have been justified (pronounced "not guilty") (1 Corinthians 6:11)
- I have been forgiven of my sins (1 John 1:9)
- When I sin, I have an Advocate – Jesus Christ, who speaks to the Father in my defense (1 John 2:1)
- I am a new creation, the old has passed away, and the new has come (2 Corinthians 5:17)
- I have been blessed in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ (Ephesians 1:3)
- I belong, I have been adopted, I have a spiritual family (Ephesians 1:5)
- I have resurrection power (Ephesians 1:19-20)

- I have God's grace that teaches me to say "no" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live a self-controlled, upright, and godly life (Titus 2:11-12, 1 Corinthians 10:13)

3. Read 1 Corinthians 10:1-14. Unpack the meaning of verse 13 in light of the surrounding verses. How does this spiritual truth help you live as a Christian in the face of temptation?

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 150: 10/26/2025



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week, I'll share a story about an airplane trip I (Jim) took a few years ago and how that relates to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

First Reading:

The first reading is from the Apocryphal book of Sirach.

> *The LORD is a God of justice,*
> *who knows no favorites.*
> *Though not unduly partial toward the weak,*
> *yet he hears the cry of the oppressed.*
> *The Lord is not deaf to the wail of the orphan,*
> *nor to the widow when she pours out her complaint.*
> *The one who serves God willingly is heard;*
> *his petition reaches the heavens.*
> *The prayer of the lowly pierces the clouds;*
> *it does not rest till it reaches its goal,*
> *nor will it withdraw till the Most High responds,*
> *judges justly and affirms the right,*
> *and the Lord will not delay.*
> *SIR 35:12-14, 16-18*

The writer proclaims how God cares for those in the lower classes of society, like the weak, orphans, and widows. Widows were especially oppressed in biblical times, although God proclaimed throughout the Old Testament how the nation of Israel was to care for them. In Psalm 68:5, God said He is the "father of the fatherless and the protector of widows." In the New Testament, God calls His believers to care for these people. James 1:27 says, "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction." God calls us to emulate His spirit of compassion for those in the underclass and oppressed in our society.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

This passage comes from the Apostle Paul's last known letter, written to Timothy, his son in the faith.

Second Reading:

> *6 For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is*

> *near. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.*

Skipped verses (9-15): Personal Remarks

> *9 Do your best to come to me quickly, 10 for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia. 11 Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry. 12 I sent Tychicus to Ephesus. 13 When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls, especially the parchments. 14 Alexander the metalworker did me a great deal of harm. The Lord will repay him for what he has done. 15 You too should be on your guard against him, because he strongly opposed our message. 16 At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. 17 But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion's mouth. 18 The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

A person's last words bring a sober realization of one's life and values. Here, we see that Paul's values are consistent with his message of salvation through faith in God's grace. The first section points to these essential truths about biblical Christianity:

- Faith is not easy—Paul said he was being poured out like a drink offering (read "sacrifice"). He also likens faith to a fight and a rigorous race. While he feels spent on behalf of his call, he realizes that the sacrifices have been a special offering to the Lord.

- Faith is worth it! Paul looks back with satisfaction at the fact that he has kept the faith. He is not implying that one can lose one's salvation. He is marveling that God has kept him faithful amid significant opposition.

- Faith provides us with hope for the future. Death is not the end of the story. Paul states that

there is great reward on the other side for him—specifically a crown of righteousness. Why is this so valuable to Paul? Righteousness, being right with God, is the entrance requirement for heaven. Paul knew that he was wrong with God based on his own performance. So to think that at the end of his earthly life, he would be rewarded by being in right standing with God was a treasure he cherished.

- The Lord is righteous in his judgments, which means that his perspective and rulings are the final word and are right. There will be no arguing with or manipulating the Lord, the righteous judge, at the end of our lives. His word is final. This should give us motivation to get on the same page with Him now so that we will not be surprised in the life to come.

- Faith is equated to longing for Jesus' appearing. We may wonder how these two concepts connect. Longing for Jesus' appearing implies faith since we long for things we love. Longing for Christ's appearing is an expression of our relational intimacy, affection, and value system bent toward Christ. The treasure of a crown of righteousness can be ours as well if we, like Paul, long for his appearing.

Although verses 9-15 are skipped in the Mass Reading, they are essential for establishing Paul as a real person with genuine relationships, in real messes, expressing real faith. The application for us is that we can be encouraged to know that real Christians have real struggles amongst circumstances and people that are out of our control (but are still under God's control).

The last section tells how Paul got through his struggles and the open opposition he felt against the message of Good News. He attributes his success to the Lord, who stood by his side and gave him strength. This strong trust in the Lord allowed him to forgive others deserted him. He was not compelled to pay anybody back for the wrongs they had done to him. He could let them off the hook because he trusted the Lord to defend him. What a vision for us—to have such deep roots in the Lord that painful offenses and hurts can be released and brought into perspective.

I (Christy) remember when I was deeply hurt by someone who claimed to love me. His desertion in my time of need left a large wound that I could not, in my own strength, forgive. Until this point in my life, I had easily forgiven others of their offenses, but curled up in a fetal position on my bed, crying from the emotional pain that would not go away, I asked the Lord to help me forgive. While

the feelings of forgiveness did not happen overnight, eventually, I could release this person from the debt that their offense had incurred. I imagine that Paul, too, had to work through bitterness, resentment, and anger to not hold these hurts against those who deserved severe consequences. Like the story of the tax collector, when one sees the outstanding debt forgiven on our behalf, it is difficult to feel justified in withholding forgiveness from others.

Paul ends with a sense that the Lord will rescue and bring him safely to his heavenly kingdom. So, no matter what obstacles or trials we face, we can trust that nothing can ultimately harm us because we are in Christ. No wonder Paul breaks out in praise: "To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen." We can have a deep, abiding rest and assurance that God will care for us as His children, no matter what!

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

It was the classical dark and stormy night as I (Jim) flew the instrument approach into snowy Saranac Lake, New York, with two friends nestled warmly in the seat behind me one night in March. As I made the necessary turns and altitude changes, I manipulated the aircraft's radar system downwards to reveal the two mountains on either side. These showed up in bright red on the screen, although my passengers were oblivious to the danger. Later, they told me that what they perceived was a methodical series of a dozen button presses and knobs being turned, followed by the plane emerging from the clouds and being greeted with flashing runway lights welcoming us to New York. As we taxied off the runway, they congratulated me on a great landing, and we headed for the terminal to pick up our rental car. As we made our way towards the resort at which we were staying in Lake Placid, I settled down for a relaxing drink in the lounge. What a great trip!

Then the terror hit me. I had forgotten to cancel my flight plan with air traffic control! As I frantically called air control on my cell phone, I knew I was in trouble. I knew that since this was a flight performed under instrument flight regulations, search and rescue procedures would have been initiated immediately if I had not reported on the ground after a few minutes of signing off from the in-flight air traffic control. The flight service station answered on the first ring, and I explained that I had made a huge mistake and had forgotten to cancel my flight plan. In my state of utter shock, I begged for forgiveness and prayed at the same time. The controller explained that the sheriff had indeed been called and had launched a search for the plane. They first looked in the aircraft parking area, where they had already located my plane safely tied down. I knew that I deserved punishment since the typical response to such an infraction would be at least the suspension of my license for a period and a hefty fine. But the controller said, "Never mind, it's OK. We are just glad that you are

safe. Have a good evening." [If you want to read the whole story, I wrote about it **here**.]

Have you ever been in a situation where you deserved punishment and even knew it was coming, but got off the hook? What if I had proudly told the air traffic controller that it wasn't my fault? Do you think he would have easily let me off the hook by confronting him this way?

That is what we will talk about in our Gospel lesson today. In the Gospel lesson, Jesus told a parable about two people who approached God with completely different hearts. The New International Version entitled this section, "The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector," since it was evident from the context of the previous chapters that the first man in this parable today was a member of the group known as the Pharisees. We have frequently discussed this group in past lessons; here's a review of their primary traits. The Pharisees held to a strict interpretation of the Jewish Law, but also added requirements known in the New Testament as traditions. Their doctrine evolved over several hundred years until the observance of their traditions became more important to them than obeying a basic interpretation of the Jewish Law. Jesus said in Mark's Gospel regarding the Pharisee's traditions, "You nicely set aside the commandment of God to keep your tradition" (Mark 7:9). Jesus summed up his feelings about them by saying several chapters earlier in Luke, "Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness." The Pharisees approached God with a proud heart compared to the tax collector, who we will read about in the following parable today.

The Gospel lesson today was a parable in which Jesus illustrated prayer by contrasting two different types of people: a religious Pharisee and a humble tax collector.

Gospel Reading:

> *9 To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: 10 "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' 13 But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' 14 I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." Luke 18:9-14 NIV*

It was helpful in this study to step back and survey the context of this text. This parable was sandwiched between the parable of the persistent widow (we studied last week) and an incident in which the disciples scolded a group of children who approached Jesus (Luke 18:15-17). The point of the first parable was that believers should always pray and not lose heart (Luke 18:1). The persistent widow expressed grown-up, godly faith and never gave up seeking justice. The point of the story of the children visiting Jesus was to illustrate the value of possessing childlike faith. Jesus closed the section by saying, "whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." It was useful to understand this context because the parable we are studying today deals with the same subjects addressed in the two surrounding stories, prayer and the condition of a person's heart while praying. With these truths in mind, we approached the central text being studied today.

This parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector was a study of contrasts between the proud heart of the Pharisee and the meek heart of the tax collector. Luke began with a summary statement about the condition of the Pharisee's heart. They were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else (v. 9). Conversely, the tax collector referred to himself as a sinner (v. 13b). The Pharisee's prayer was nothing more than a boast about his perceived goodness. His prayer was similar to a eulogy that he gave himself! The Pharisees' works were substantial since the Law only required fasting once a year and tithing only upon crops and animals. But his boastful prayer never made it up to heaven to the one who could answer it, though this man never asked for anything. It was evident that the Pharisee believed that he obtained righteous standing with God through his religious works or perceived goodness.On the other hand, the tax collector perceived that righteousness came only through God's power. His prayer reflected a humble and contrite heart. The deep contrast between the two men in the story illustrated the central truth of the parable. God calls believers to be reconciled to Himself through humble acceptance of their sinful position before Him. They cannot earn their way to God, but must accept Jesus' finished work on the cross to be found righteous before Him.

One of the defining doctrines of the New Testament is justification by faith and not by works. The topic of justification is found in verse 14, "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. All those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." The keyword is "justified." This word in the New Testament is a legal term that means "a declaration of one to be innocent or just." A way to remember the biblical application of "justified" is, "Just as if I'd never sinned." When a person is declared just in the eyes of God, they are considered righteous, such that they don't receive their rightful penalty for their sin. The source of a believer's righteousness is foreign, meaning it doesn't come from their own works or self-perceived goodness. God's righteousness can only come through the gateway of faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ. God has declared the universality of sin. Paul said, "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). He explained further in Romans that the

proper payment for a life of sin was death, meaning eternal separation from God. However, with this bad news, he also brought good news, literally the word in the New Testament translated as "Gospel." "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). Paul explains that faith in Jesus is the mechanism through which the gift of eternal life is imparted to the believer. "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). Good works are essential

in serving the Lord and provide evidence of salvation, but they are not the *source* of our justification. Righteous standing before God can only be granted by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

Some questions may arise after this very brief study of justification. Some may ask, "Can we just keep on sinning since we believe and are going to heaven?" Paul answered quite succinctly in the Book of Romans. *"1 What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? 2 By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?"* (6:1-2). What about the role of works in our salvation? The Scriptures obviously state that we cannot earn salvation through our works, but works are significant because they are the method through which we serve the Lord Jesus. Finally, others may inquire, Can we know that we have received salvation through faith in Jesus? Isn't that presumptuous? The Disciple John said, "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:13, emphasis added). Yes, you can know that you have received salvation. The Holy Spirit testifies to this fact. Paul said in Romans, "For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.' 16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children" (8:15-16). Having questions is normal and reveals that a person is seeking the truth of Scripture. Paul said, "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you–unless, of course, you fail the test?" (1 Corinthians 13:5).

Reflection Questions

1. Justification through faith in God's grace is an important concept. Summarize your understanding of what justification means, why it is necessary for salvation, and how one can be assured of just standing before the LORD.

2. If you recognize that you, like the Pharisee, have been trusting in your good works to get you into right standing before God, take a moment and confess this wrong attitude in your heart to the LORD. First John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

3. Review the bullet points about biblical Christianity from the discussion on the second reading. Which points address a specific question, concern, or fear of your life? How does this truth provide you with comfort, hope, or direction?

4. In what genuine relationships and real messes are you finding it hard to exercise genuine faith? How can Paul's example of fighting the good fight, longing for the appearing of the Lord, and forgiving those who hurt him inspire you? Take a moment and talk to the Lord about your situation. Ask him to stand by your side and give you strength, so that you too might say—"To him be glory for ever and ever"!

Sunday Mass Study Notes for 10-27-2024



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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we open with a message of hope from the Prophet Jeremiah. The application is that although we as believers sin, God will ultimately fulfill all of His promises to us, including restoration and life with Him in a perfect kingdom. In the second reading from Hebrews, we examine Jesus' intercession for us as our eternal High Priest. We conclude the lesson with Mark's story about Jesus' healing of a blind man named Bartimaeus.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from chapter 31 of the Book of Jeremiah. In Books like Jeremiah that combine history and prophecy, understanding the context is crucial to interpreting the text. In the reading, Jeremiah finds himself in the midst of the aftermath of the first two exiles of the people of Judah to Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar. The third and final deportation and destruction of Jerusalem is on the near horizon at which time Jeremiah will find himself carried to Babylon with an intermediate stop along the way in Egypt. In the first and second deportations in 605 and 597 BC, the prophets Daniel and Ezekiel respectively, were carried to Babylon to continue their prophetic writings from that far away country. Two chapters before today's reading Jeremiah brought a message of hope to the two previously exiled groups from Judah (the Southern Kingdom) in Babylon. God's instructions to the people through Jeremiah were to live normally and fruitfully in that distant land. They were to "Build houses and live in them; and plant gardens and eat their produce" and "Take wives and become the fathers of sons and daughters, and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; and multiply there and do not decrease" (Jeremiah 29:5.6). The Jews living as exiles in Babylon were to "Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf; for in its welfare you will have welfare" (v. 7).

First Reading:

> *Jeremiah 31:7-9 NAS95 7 For thus says the LORD, "Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob, And shout among the chief of the nations; Proclaim, give praise and say, 'O LORD, save Your people, The remnant of Israel.' 8 "Behold, I am bringing them from the north country, And I will gather them from the remote parts of the earth, Among them the blind and the lame, The woman with child and she who is in labor with child, together; A great company, they will return here. 9 "With weeping they will come, And by supplication I will lead them; I will make*

> *them walk by streams of waters, On a straight path in which they will not stumble; For I am a father to Israel, And Ephraim is My firstborn."*

Jeremiah spoke as God's anointed prophet to the southern tribes of Judah and therefore the reading begins with, "For thus says the LORD" (v. 7a). God had warned the people over and over again that unless they repented, He would send them into captivity to atone for their sin. This message of hope was important to the exiles, but Jeremiah continued his warnings to Judah that unless they repented, God would take the rest of the people captive and destroy the city of Jerusalem along with the temple. The message in today's reading is one of hope to all of the exiles that God would one day restore them back to the land. It also provides hope to the exiles of the Northern Kingdom taken back in 722 BC by the Assyrians, although the message was written to Judah. The reading continues Jeremiah's proclamation about this future restoration. Just prior to this, Jeremiah told the people, "For behold, days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'when I will restore the fortunes of My people Israel and Judah.' The LORD says, 'I will also bring them back to the land that I gave to their forefathers and they shall possess it.'" (Jeremiah 30:3). Although the third and final exile had not yet happened, this message of hope was written to all of the exiles, as it was a foregone conclusion.

Jeremiah's message concerned hope in the future restoration of the people of Judah to the land. He said that the people "gather[ed] from the remote parts of the earth . . . A great company, they will return here" (v. 7). Although King Nebuchadnezzar had already deported two large groups from Judah to Babylon, the final destruction was due to come very soon with the siege of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple. Interestingly, God included the Northern Kingdom in this message about the future regathering and restoration of the Israelite people by mentioning "Ephraim is My firstborn" (v. 9). The Prophet Daniel, who was the first to be exiled to Babylon, said concerning the Southern Kingdom that the period of time which they would be held captive after this final event would be seventy years (Daniel 9:24). After these "seventy sevens" of years, Daniel said that a decree would be issued and that Jerusalem would be rebuilt and restored (Daniel 9:25). Jeremiah said the same thing just two chapters before the reading. "When seventy years have been completed for Babylon, I will visit you and fulfill My good word to you, to bring you back to this place" (Jeremiah 29:10). Ultimately, with the mention of Ephraim and a universal regathering of the Jews, we must look to the future restoration of the entire kingdom of Israel under the reign of Jesus Christ that will happen upon His return. The big idea is that although the people had sinned, God would forgive their sin and complete the promises that He had made to them to inherit all of the Promised Land. The terms of His promises to them were confirmed in the various covenants. Although many of God's promises to Israel were tied to their inheritance of material blessings such as the land, the Bible is full of spiritual promises to them including salvation through their future Savior.

The application of Jeremiah's message for us today is that although "all of us have sinned and fallen

short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23)," "if we confess our sins God is faithful and just to forgive our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). We, like the Jews, continually miss the mark. We share in the message of hope that God will complete all of the promises that He has made to us. We cannot make the mistake as some have done by claiming the church has replaced Israel and that since God has forsaken Israel the church will inherit the promises that God made to them. Instead, God will make good both on His promises to Israel and on the promises He made to the church. *For more about God's promises to the church refer to the first study question.*

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from Chapter 5 of the Book of Hebrews. The overall message of the Book is the contrast between the Old and New Covenants. The Old Covenant was incomplete and imperfect in the sense that it came through the Levitical priesthood that was passing away because of its connection to mortal high priests. In contrast, the New Covenant is proffered through the eternal priesthood of Jesus Christ, who is in the line of Melchizedek. This theme comes out very clearly in today's reading.

Second Reading:

> *Hebrews 5:1-6 NAS95 1 For every high priest taken from among men is appointed on behalf of men in things pertaining to God, in order to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins; 2 he can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness; 3 and because of it he is obligated to offer sacrifices for sins, as for the people, so also for himself. 4 And no one takes the honor to himself, but receives it when he is called by God, even as Aaron was. 5 So also Christ did not glorify Himself so as to become a high priest, but He who said to Him, "YOU ARE MY SON, TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU"; 6 just as He says also in another passage, "YOU ARE A PRIEST FOREVER ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK."*

The author explained how God in the Old Testament appointed the mortal, weak and misguided high priests of the Levitical line (Aaron) in order not only to offer sacrifices for other people but also for themselves (v. 3). In contrast, God the Father appointed Christ as our eternal High Priest according

to the order of Melchizedek, not Aaron (v. 6). It's important to understand the man named Melchizedek mentioned in verse 5. The first time we find Melchizedek in the Bible is in Genesis 14:17-20 where we find him bringing out bread and wine to greet Abraham, who was returning from battle with the forces that kidnapped his nephew Lot. Hebrews 7:1 says about this, "Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham as he was returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him." Looking at the book of Hebrews as a whole you can see that it's grounded in an explanation of Christ through the perspective of the Levitical Old Testament priesthood, thus the title given to the book "Hebrews" meaning Jews (see Genesis 14:3 where Abram, later called Abraham, the father of the Jews, is called a Hebrew). We see there in Hebrews 7:1 that Melchizedek is three things: 1. The king of Salem, the area we now identify as Jerusalem, 2. A priest of the "Most High God," meaning a priest of the *only* true God, and 3. One to whom Abraham the father of the Jews gave tribute. Today's reading said that Christ is of the "order of Melchizedek (v. 5), which is a quote from Psalms 110:4. According to the Book of Leviticus, all of the Old Testament Priests had to come from the tribe of Levi, but Melchizedek was a priest before the Law even existed! Yet Abraham gave a tenth portion (or tithe) to Melchizedek (Hebrews 7:4) as required under the later Law for all priests (verse 5). What is being explained here is that Melchizedek was one of a class of priests that foreshadowed the coming final, eternal High Priest, Jesus. Melchizedek, whose name means King of righteousness, could not have come from the line of Aaron (Levi) or Judah, because these did not exist during his lifetime. Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament sacrificial system, the final sacrifice was Jesus' own death on the cross which did away with the Levitical priesthood (Hebrews 10:11-14). Jesus was from the "order of Melchizedek" (Ps 110:4, Hebrews 7:17), not the line of Aaron. This is new order is made even more clear by reading beyond the quoted section of Psalm 110 to verse 7, "Therefore He will lift up his head." This eternal priest, Jesus, of the non-priestly line of Judah is (and will be) exalted by God. Melchizedek was the first biblical person to picture the reality of a priest/king.

There are numerous implications for our lives relative to Jesus as The High Priest according to the line of Melchizedek. Jesus' ministry to us as the only intercessor between us and the Father (1 Timothy 2:5) is eternal. Second, we will never be subject to the frailties of a human priesthood because Jesus replaced the Levitical Priesthood forever. Since Jesus lived as a Man on earth, He can identify with the things that trouble us in this life. "For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). Jesus provides all who believe in Him with hope that one day our human weakness will be removed and we will be restored to a new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 21:1).

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel lesson is from Mark 10 and follows James and John's request to "Grant that we may sit, one on Your right and one on Your left, in Your glory" (Mark 10:37). Jesus taught them that they would suffer for Him, but it was not for them to choose their position as this was up to the will of His Father (Matthew 10:38-40). This discussion caused the other ten disciples to "feel indignant with James and John" (v. 41). Next, on their way to Jerusalem, they stopped along the way in Jericho.

Gospel Reading:

> *Mark 10:46-52 NAS95 46 Then they came to Jericho. And as He was leaving Jericho with His disciples and a large crowd, a blind beggar named Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the road. 47 When he heard that it was Jesus the Nazarene, he began to cry out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" 48 Many were sternly telling him to be quiet, but he kept crying out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" 49 And Jesus stopped and said, "Call him here." So they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take courage, stand up! He is calling for you." 50 Throwing aside his cloak, he jumped up and came to Jesus. 51 And answering him, Jesus said, "What do you want Me to do for you?" And the blind man said to Him, "Rabboni, I want to regain my sight!" 52 And Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and began following Him on the road.*

The beggar named Bartimaeus is a name that means son of Timaeus, because "bar" means "son of." Blind people in this culture had few resources and were without any sort of social support system so they frequently had to resort to begging. Bartimaeus took great initiative and jumped up on his own, the text doesn't say that someone else led him there. Twice he called to Jesus using the Messianic title "Son of David." This indicated that he had some knowledge about who Jesus was. He recognized that Jesus was the only One that could open the eyes of the blind, both in the physical sense, but also spiritually as well through his use of the Messianic title for Him. The blind man then heard the people calling to him and then threw away his cloak, possibly the only valuable possession that he owned. Bartimaeus not only received his sight, but the text says that "his faith made him well" (v. 52), meaning that he also received the forgiveness of his sins as well. Afterwards, he became a follower of Jesus, both literally and spiritually (v. 52).

What does this mean for us today? We too have to be willing to take a bold step of faith and throw away our valuable possessions in order to find spiritual healing through Jesus. As former unbelievers, we too are blind to the reality of sin in our lives. Saint Paul says, "And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who

is the image of God" (2 Corinthians 4:3-4). There are many reasons that Jesus calls Himself the Light of the World (John 8:12) because as the Light He shines truth upon the spiritual darkness of our hearts. It is only through faith in Jesus that we receive spiritual life (Ephesians 2:8-9). Finally, we can praise God for this tremendous miracle of healing that he provided Bartimaeus in a culture where blind people were on the lowest rung of society. We can praise Him for all the times that He has healed us and others around us, even if we were not aware of His intervention on our behalf.

Reflection Questions

1. In the first reading we said that God would make good on both His promises to Israel and His promises to the church. Reflect upon the following promises that God has made to you, and how this provides you with hope during the troubled and the short days of your earthly lifetime.

A. Salvation to all who believe in His Son Jesus. "Romans 1:16-17 NAS95 16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'BUT THE RIGHTEOUS man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.'"

B. God will work out all things for the our good as a believer. "Romans 8:28 NAS95 28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."

C. As believers, we receive a new life in Christ. "2 Corinthians 5:17 NAS95 17 Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come."

D. God promises believers peace when they persist in calling upon Him in prayer. "Philippians 4:6-7 NAS95 6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

2. The Book of Hebrews begins with, "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets

at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe" (Hebrews 1:1-2). In what ways is Jesus as the true eternal high priest / king (that fulfilled the requirements of the Law) the only possible One who can make intercession for us (1 Timothy 2:5)?

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Mark 10:46-52 NAS95 46 Then they came to Jericho. And as He was leaving Jericho with His disciples and a large crowd, a blind beggar named Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the road. 47 When he heard that it was Jesus the Nazarene, he began to cry out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" 48 Many were sternly telling him to be quiet, but he kept crying out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" 49 And Jesus stopped and said, "Call him here." So they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take courage, stand up! He is calling for you." 50 Throwing aside his cloak, he jumped up and came to Jesus. 51 And answering him, Jesus said, "What

do you want Me to do for you?" And the blind man said to Him, "Rabboni, I want to regain my sight!" 52 And Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and began following Him on the road.

The beggar named Bartimaeus is a name that means son of Timaeus, because "bar" means "son of." Blind people in this culture had few resources and were without any sort of social support systems so they frequently had to resort to begging. Bartimaeus took great initiative and jumped up on his own, the text doesn't say that someone else led him there. Twice he called to Jesus using the Messianic title "Son of David." This indicated that he had some knowledge about who Jesus was. He recognized that Jesus was the only One that could open the eyes of the blind, both in the physical sense, but also spiritually as well through his use of the Messianic title for Him. The blind man then heard the people calling to him and then threw away his cloak, possibly the only valuable possession that he owned. Bartimaeus not only received his sight, but the text says that "his faith made him well" (v. 52), meaning that he also received the forgiveness of his sins as well. Afterwards he became a follower of Jesus, both literally and spiritually (v. 52).

What does this mean for us today? We too have to be willing to take a bold step of faith and throw away our valuable possessions in order to find spiritual healing through Jesus. As former unbelievers, we too are blind to the reality of sin in our lives. Saint Paul says, "And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Corinthians 4:3-4). There are many reasons that Jesus calls Himself the Light of the World (John 8:12) because as the Light He shines truth upon the spiritual darkness of our hearts. It is only through faith in Jesus that we receive spiritual life (Ephesians 2:8-9). Finally, we can praise God for this tremendous miracle of healing that he provided Bartimaeus in a culture where blind people were on the lowest rung of society. We can praise Him for all the times that He has healed us and others around us, even if we were not aware of His intervention on our behalf.

Reflection Questions

1. In the first reading we said that God would make good on both His promises to Israel and His promises to the church. Reflect upon the following promises that God has made to you, and how this provides you with hope during the troubled and the short days of your earthly lifetime.

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A. Salvation to all who believe in His Son Jesus. "Romans 1:16-17 NAS95 16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'BUT THE RIGHTEOUS man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.'"

B. God will work out all things for the our good as a believer. "Romans 8:28 NAS95 28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."

C. As believers, we receive a new life in Christ. "2 Corinthians 5:17 NAS95 17 Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come."

D. God promises believers peace when they persist in calling upon Him in prayer. "Philippians 4:6-7 NAS95 6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

2. The Book of Hebrews begins with, "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe" (Hebrews 1:1-2). In what ways is Jesus as the true eternal high priest / king (that fulfilled the requirements of the Law) the only possible One who can make intercession for us (1 Timothy 2:5)?

Sunday Mass Study Notes for 10-25-2020

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we open with the first reading from Moses' Book of Exodus in which we see God's concern for widows, orphans, and the poor. Then we move to the second reading, which is a continuation of the study we began last week from 1 Thessalonians. We conclude with another of Jesus' discussions with the Jewish leaders from the Gospel of Saint Matthew, this time with the infamous Pharisees.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from Chapter 22 of the Book of Exodus. This is one of the first five Books of the Bible known as the Pentateuch and was written by Moses. The Book is an account of God's sovereign rising of Moses as a leader to shepherd the Israelites out of their captivity in Israel. The Book also contains the chronicle of the giving of the Law to Moses including the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai. Anytime that the biblical texts use the term "Law" they mean the whole canon of the Jewish Law including the Ten Commandments and the other several hundred laws contained in the last four books of the Pentateuch: Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Chapter 20 contains the Ten Commandments and opens as follows. "Then God spoke all these words, saying, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." (Exodus 20:1-2). God, who calls Himself "I am" in verse one, meaning the "self-existent One," led the Israelites out of their bondage under the oppressive rule of the Pharaoh of Egypt through His ordained leader Moses.

God gradually revealed the entire Canon of the Law to Moses during his wanderings in the desert.

Understanding today's reading requires some considerable insights into the cultural and religious milieu of Jews in the ancient near east. Foreigners were not the only downtrodden class of people to whom God afforded special protection in the Law. In those days there were three classes of people that were as low in the socioeconomic strata as foreigners were. These were widows, orphans, and the poor, although the first two certainly shared the characteristic of being poor. These groups of people had almost no rights in the secular kingdoms that surrounded Israel. However, we find throughout the Law God's special protection provided for these groups of people. The fact that God provides protection for the lower classes of people through the Law is an insight into God's very nature. We see in the Book of Psalms God's care for the poor. God says that He is "A father of the fatherless and a judge for the widows" (Psalms 68:5). The Psalmist said, "I know that the LORD will maintain the cause of the afflicted And justice for the poor" (Ps 140:12). "The LORD performs righteous deeds And judgments for all who are oppressed," the Psalmist said (Ps 103:6). God made special provisions for the protection of these classes of people throughout the Law. In Lev. 19:9–10 God provided special protection for strangers and the poor in providing for them through the gleanings in the corners of the fields. In Deut. 14:28–29 God provided special Laws for strangers, the fatherless, and widows. The Prophet Isaiah gave God's call to the Israelites to repent of their sin in the opening of his Book. God said, "Learn to do good; Seek justice, Reprove the ruthless, Defend the orphan, Plead for the widow" (Isaiah 1:17). This admonition appears multiple times throughout the Old Testament, and is in fact what James in the New Testament called "basic religion." He said, "Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world" (James 1:27).

As you read the text of the first reading, try to imagine what it would be like to have absolutely nothing along with no social standing in the ancient world. *Note: Verse 27 was included for the context.*

First Reading:

Ezekiel 22:20-26 NAS95 20 'As they gather silver and bronze and iron and lead and tin into the furnace to blow fire on it in order to melt it, so I will gather you in My anger and in My wrath and I will lay you there and melt you. 21 'I will gather you and blow on you with the fire of My wrath, and you will be melted in the midst of it. 22 'As silver is melted in the furnace, so you will be melted in the midst of it; and you will know that I, the LORD, have poured out My wrath on you.'" 23 And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, 24 "Son of man, say to her, 'You are a land that is not

cleansed or rained on in the day of indignation.' 25 "There is a conspiracy of her prophets in her midst like a roaring lion tearing the prey. They have devoured lives; they have taken treasure and precious things; they have made many widows in the midst of her. 26 "Her priests have done violence to My law and have profaned My holy things; they have made no distinction between the holy and the profane, and they have not taught the difference between the unclean and the clean; and they hide their eyes from My sabbaths, and I am profaned among them.

The reading opens in verse 20, we find the often-repeated warning about idolatry. "He who sacrifices to any god, other than to the LORD alone, shall be utterly destroyed" (Exodus 20:20). In the next verse, God introduces new teaching on proper treatment of aliens. God said, "You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Exodus 20:21). This time God gave a reason for treating foreigners properly, because the Israelites were once foreigners under the rule of the Pharaoh.

In the reading we see God's concern for widows (v. 22), orphans (v. 22), and the poor (v. 25). God said that He would hear the cries of the widows and the orphans and answer with judgment by allowing the people to be killed by their enemies with the sword (v. 24). This is something that was repeated over and over again throughout the Old Testament, especially in the era of the Judges. When times were good the people would begin to oppress the lower classes, then God would allow an alien nation to overtake the people. Then they would repent, God would raise up a deliver (for example a judge like Gideon in Judges 6), the people would again return to prosperity and the cycle would repeat. God's instruction about not oppressing the poor continued in verses 26-27 as neighbor took his neighbor's cloak as collateral for a loan. This person was so poor that the only thing that they had to pledge was their clothing. God knew that this was a dire situation and provided a clear principle that such essential items were not to be taken as collateral in loans among fellow Israelites. The principle is that when the poor neighbor is taken advantage of by being forced to pledge his essentials in order to survive that God will raise up a deliverer against the more prosperous man to bring judgment upon him for his unrighteous action. Instead, God said in Leviticus something that we shall study later in the Gospel lesson, "You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD" (Leviticus 19:18). Loving your neighbor in the case of what God said about not taking your neighbor's cloak as a pledge instead meant sharing in your abundance and that of the community.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

As we move onto the second reading, ask yourself what it means to act in full conviction of the Holy Spirit in response to the biblical precepts about serving Jesus and others? The Jews knew the Laws about not oppressing aliens, orphans and the poor, yet they didn't practice what was preached. You may have heard the cute acronym "J-O-Y" which means to consider our lives in light of the hierarchy of Jesus, others, and you. We should, as the teaching goes, consider Jesus first, then others, and finally ourselves. See what you can uncover from Saint Paul as your read his admonition on this subject of literally taking the Word to heart.

Second Reading:

5 for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. 6 You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, 7 so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. 8 For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything. 9 For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, 10 and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come. (1 Thessalonians 1:5-10)

Paul told the Thessalonians how impressed he was with them because they didn't just do as he had told them to do ("word only," v. 5), but that they also carried out those things that he had directed them to do through the power of the Holy Spirit. Not only that, but they became examples to others (v. 7). The Thessalonians turned from the worship of idols as was the custom of their culture to the worship of the One True God (v. 9). Finally, Paul commended them for holding hope in the resurrection of the dead. When he said that Jesus "rescues us from the wrath to come" (v. 10) he was referring to the eternal punishment that was promised to the unbelievers in hell, not some sort of temporal deliverance or rapture (catching up) from their present circumstances. Later in the Book Paul did discuss how believers who were alive at the time when Jesus did return would be united with him in the clouds (1 Thessalonians 4:17), which is the context of the books and movie entitled *Left Behind* (we will cover that in a future lesson). The key point that Paul was making to the Thessalonians was his commendation for them for living out their Christian lives in word **and** in action, something that the Sadducees and Pharisees in the Gospel narrative hadn't learned.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

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We saw in the second reading Saint Paul's admonition to take the Word to heart and his commendation to the Thessalonians for doing so. In the Gospel lesson today, we will see how Jesus summarized the Law into two key points that revealed the hypocrisy of the Pharisees hearts who didn't take the Word to heart. This lesson is another of Jesus' interactions with the Jewish ruling authorities during His inevitable journey to death at Calvary, this time with one of the Pharisees' best legal experts.

Gospel Reading:

34 But when the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered themselves together. 35 One of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, 36 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" 37 And He said to him, "'YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.' 38 This is the great and foremost commandment. 39 The second is like it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' 40 On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 22:34-40)

First, a bit about the context. When Matthew said, "But when the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees," he was referring to the story that happened just previously. Here the Sadducees, who didn't believe in the resurrection of the dead, had come to ask Jesus a theoretical expansion of the Levitical Law known as Levirate Marriage. They asked Jesus about the relationship in the resurrection between a certain woman and her chain of husbands afforded to her under the Levirate Law. Remember that the Sadducees didn't believe in the resurrection, but they were just trying to trap Jesus. When they asked Jesus whose husband the woman would be in the resurrection after being married to seven different brothers Jesus answered them as follows: *29 But Jesus answered and said to them, "You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God. 30 For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. 31 But regarding the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God: 32 'I AM THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, AND THE GOD OF ISAAC, AND THE GOD OF JACOB'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living." 33 When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at His teaching. (Matthew 22:29-33)*

The short-term silencing of the Sadducees provided the Pharisees with the opportunity to test Jesus for themselves. They asked Him, "which is the great commandment in the Law" (v. 36), again addressing Him with the honorable title of Rabbi (teacher). When the Pharisees use the term "Law" they are referring to the whole of the Old Testament. During that era, a frequent debate among the

rabbis was which elements of the Law held the most weight and which ones could be given less weight or even discounted. Jesus' answer summarized the whole Canon of both the Law **and** the Prophetic writings. He answered them by quoting from the Levitical Law, "YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.' This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets" (vv. 38-40). Here, Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:5 or the "Shema," a phrase that religious Jews stated twice a day. He also quoted from Leviticus 19:18 that we mentioned in the discussion of the first reading.

What Jesus is saying is that a true follower of God is a unique whole being, one with a heart that is united in purpose (heart, soul, and mind) rather than compartmentalized into theoretical knowledge that does not lead to action. Loving God naturally leads us to keeping the commandments of God. Jesus said in John 14:23, "If anyone love Me, he will obey my teaching . . . ." Saint John continued Jesus' connection between love and action when He said, "Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue, but with action and in truth" (1 John 3:18). And again, "We love, because He first loved us. If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also" (1 John 4:19-21).

This was the heart of the indictment against the Pharisees. They were a group about which it could be said, "do as I say, but not as I do" as the expression goes. Love demands concrete action, not just correct information about God. This means to give help your neighbor when he needs help, not offer him a loan by taking his cloak as collateral as we saw in the first reading. Loving your neighbor as yourself also means loving yourself as one that was created in the image of God. This means caring for our bodies both spiritually and physically as a temple of the Holy Spirit.

Reflection Questions

1. As your journey through the week, what does it look like for you to have a heart united in love and action for God? In our global society, what "neighbor" is God placing on your heart to help with a gift that doesn't require a loan and payment of collateral?

2. Spiritually, we are all as helpless as the orphans and widows of the ancient society. How do you

respond to God's heart for you in your own spiritual poverty? What spiritual resources (see below) have you appropriated in your life? Which ones do you need to continue internalizing?

Spiritual Resources in Christ:

- I have been washed (1 Corinthians 6:11).
- I have been sanctified (set apart for special use) (1 Corinthians 6:11).
- I have been justified (pronounced "not guilty") (1 Corinthians 6:11)
- I have been forgiven of my sins (1 John 1:9)
- When I sin, I have an Advocate – Jesus Christ, who speaks to the Father in my defense (1 John 2:1)
- I am a new creation, the old has passed away and the new has come (2 Corinthians 5:17)
- I have been blessed in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ (Ephesians 1:3)
- I belong, I have been adopted, I have a spiritual family (Ephesians 1:5)
- I have resurrection power (Ephesians 1:19-20)
- I have God's grace that teaches me to say "no" to ungodliness and worldly passions and to live a self-controlled, upright and godly life (Titus 2:11-12, 1 Corinthians 10:13)

3. Read 1 Corinthians 10:1-14. Unpack the meaning of verse 13 in light of the context of the surrounding verses. How does this spiritual truth help you to live your life as a Christian in light of temptation?

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 10-27-2019

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week I relay a story about an airplane trip I (Jim) took a few years ago and how that relates to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

First Reading:

The first reading is from the Apocryphal book of Sirach.

> *The LORD is a God of justice,*
>
> *who knows no favorites.*
>
> *Though not unduly partial toward the weak,*
>
> *yet he hears the cry of the oppressed.*
>
> *The Lord is not deaf to the wail of the orphan,*
>
> *nor to the widow when she pours out her complaint.*
>
> *The one who serves God willingly is heard;*
>
> *his petition reaches the heavens.*
>
> *The prayer of the lowly pierces the clouds;*
>
> *it does not rest till it reaches its goal,*

nor will it withdraw till the Most High responds,

judges justly and affirms the right,

and the Lord will not delay.

SIR 35:12-14, 16-18

The writer proclaims how God cares for those in the lower classes of society like the weak, orphans, and widows. Widows were especially oppressed in biblical times although God proclaimed throughout the Old Testament Bible how the nation of Israel was to care for them. God said in Psalm 68:5 that He is the "father of the fatherless and the protector of widows." In the New Testament we see how God calls His believers to care for these people. James 1:27 says, "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction." God calls us to emulate His spirit of compassion for those in the underclass and oppressed in our society.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

This passage comes from the Apostle Paul's last known letter, written to Timothy, his son in the faith.

Second Reading:

6 For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

Skipped verses (9-15): Personal Remarks

9 Do your best to come to me quickly, 10 for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia. 11 Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry. 12 I sent Tychicus to Ephesus. 13 When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls, especially the parchments.

14 Alexander the metalworker did me a great deal of harm. The Lord will repay him for what he has done. 15 You too should be on your guard against him, because he strongly opposed our message.

> *16 At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. 17 But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion's mouth. 18 The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

Last words bring a sober realization of one's life and values. Here we see Paul's values being consistent with his message of salvation through faith in God's grace. The first section points to these important truths about biblical Christianity:

- Faith is not easy—Paul said he was being poured out like a drink offering (read "sacrifice"). He also likens faith to a fight and a rigorous race. While he feels spent on behalf of his call, he realizes that the sacrifices have been a special offering to the Lord.
- Faith is worth it! Paul looks back with satisfaction that he has kept the faith. He is not implying that one can lose his or her salvation. He is marveling that God has kept him faithful in the midst of great opposition.
- Faith provides us with hope for the future. Death is not the end of the story. Paul states that there is great reward on the other side for him—specifically a crown of righteousness. Why is this so valuable to Paul? Righteousness, being right with God, is the entrance requirement for heaven. Paul knew that he was not right with God based on his own performance in life. So to think that at the end of his earthly life he would be rewarded by being in right standing with God was a treasure he cherished.
- The Lord is righteous in his judgments, which means that his perspective and rulings are the final word and they are right. There will be no arguing with or manipulating the Lord, the righteous judge, at the end of our lives. His say is final. This should give us motivation to get on the same page with Him now, so that we will not be surprised in the life to come.
- Faith is equated to longing for Jesus' appearing. We may wonder how these two concepts connect. Longing for Jesus' appearing implies faith, since we long for things we love. Longing for Christ's appearing is an expression of our relational intimacy, affection and value system bent towards Christ. The treasure of a crown of righteousness can be ours as well, if we, like Paul, long for his appearing.

Although verses 9-15 are skipped in the Mass Reading, they are important for establishing Paul as a real person with real relationships, in real messes, expressing real faith. The application for us is that we can be encouraged to know that real Christians have real struggles with circumstances and people that our out of our control, but are very much still under God's control.

The last section tells how Paul got through his struggles and the open opposition he felt against the message of Good News. He attributes his success to the Lord, who stood by his side and gave him

strength. This strong trust in the Lord is what allowed him to forgive others who deserted him. He was not compelled to pay anybody back for the wrongs they had done to him. He could let them off the hook because he trusted the Lord to defend him. What a vision for us—to have such deep roots in the Lord that painful offenses and hurts can be released and brought into perspective.

I (Christy) remember a time when I was deeply hurt by an individual who claimed to love me. His desertion in my time of need left a large wound that I could not, in my own strength, forgive. Up until this point in my life, I had been able to easily forgive others of their offenses. But curled up in fetal position on my bed, crying from the emotional pain that would not go away, I asked the Lord to help me forgive. While the feelings of forgiveness did not happen overnight, eventually, I was able to release this person from the debt that their offense had incurred. I imagine that Paul, too, had to work through feelings of bitterness, resentment and anger, in order to not hold these hurts against those who deserved severe consequences. Like the story of the tax collector, when one sees the great debt that has been forgiven on our behalf, it is difficult to feel justified in withholding forgiveness from others.

Paul ends with a sense that the Lord will rescue him and bring him safely to his heavenly kingdom. So, no matter what obstacles or trials we face, we can trust that because we are in Christ nothing can ultimately harm us. No wonder Paul breaks out in praise: "To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen." What a place a deep, abiding rest and assurance that God will take care of His children, no matter what!

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

It was the classical dark and stormy night as I (Jim) flew the instrument approach into snowy Saranac Lake, New York with two friends nestled warmly in the seat behind me one night in March. As I made the necessary turns and altitude changes, I manipulated the aircraft's radar system downwards such that it revealed the two mountains on either side. These showed up in bright red on the screen, although my passengers were oblivious to the danger. Later they told me that what they perceived was a methodical series of a dozen button presses and knobs being turned followed by the plane emerging from the clouds and being greeted with flashing runway lights welcoming us to New York. As we taxied off the runway, they congratulated me on a great landing and we headed for the terminal to pick up our rental car. As we made our way towards the resort at which we were staying in Lake Placid I settled down for a relaxing drink in the lounge. What a great trip!

Then the terror hit me. I had forgotten to cancel my flight plan with air traffic control! As I frantically called air control on my cell phone I knew that I was in a lot of trouble. I knew that since this was a flight performed under instrument flight regulations that once I did not report on the ground after a few minutes of signing off from the in-flight air traffic control that search and rescue procedures would have been initiated immediately. The flight service station answered on the first ring and I explained that I had made a huge mistake and had forgotten to cancel my flight plan. In my state of utter shock, I begged for forgiveness and prayed at the same time. The controller explained that the sheriff had indeed been called and had launched a search for the plane. The first

place that they looked was in the aircraft parking area where they had already located my plane safely tied down. I knew that I deserved punishment since the typical response to such an infraction would be at a minimum the suspension of my license for a period along with a hefty fine. But the controller said, "Never mind, it's OK. We are just glad that you are safe. Have a good evening." [If you are interested in reading the whole story, I wrote about it **here**.]

Have you ever been in a situation where you deserved punishment and even knew it was coming but got off the hook? What if I had acted proudly and told the air traffic controller that it wasn't my fault. Do you think that he would have let me off the hook easily by confronting him this way?

That is what we are going to talk about in our Gospel lesson today. In the Gospel lesson, Jesus told a parable about two people who approached God with completely different hearts. The New International Version entitled this section, "The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector" since it was evident from the context of the previous chapters that the first man in this parable today was a member of the group known as the Pharisees. We have frequently discussed this group in past lessons, here's a review of their primary traits. The Pharisees were people who held to a strict interpretation of the Jewish Law but also added requirements known in the New Testament as traditions. Their doctrine evolved over several hundred years until the observance of their traditions became more important to them than obeying a basic interpretation of the Jewish Law. Jesus said in Mark's Gospel regarding the Pharisee's traditions, "You nicely set aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition" (Mark 7:9). Jesus summed up his feelings about them by saying several chapters earlier in Luke, "Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness." The Pharisees approached God with a proud heart compared to the tax collector who we will read about in the next parable today.

The Gospel lesson today was a parable through which Jesus illustrated prayer through the contrast of two different types of people, a religious Pharisee and a humble tax collector.

Gospel Reading:

> *9 To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: 10 "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' 13 But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'*
>
> *14 I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." Luke 18:9-14 NIV*

It was helpful in this study to step back and survey the context of this text. This parable was sandwiched between the parable of the persistent widow (that we studied last week) and an incident in which a group of children who approached Jesus were scolded by the disciples (Luke 18:15-17). The point of the first parable was that believers are always to pray and not lose heart (Luke 18:1). The persistent widow expressed grownup, godly faith and never gave up seeking justice. The point of the story of the children coming to visit Jesus was to illustrate the value of possessing childlike faith. Jesus closed the section by saying, "whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." It was useful to understand this context because the parable we are studying today deals with the same subjects addressed in the two surrounding stories, prayer and the condition of a person's heart while praying. It was with these truths in mind that we approached the central text being studied today.

This parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector was a study of contrasts between the proud heart of the Pharisee and the meek heart of the tax collector. Luke began with a summary statement about the condition of the Pharisee's heart. They were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else (v.9). On the other hand, the tax collector referred to himself as a sinner (v.13b). The Pharisee's prayer was nothing more than a boast about his perceived goodness. His prayer was similar to a eulogy which he gave himself! The Pharisees' works were substantial since the Law only required fasting once a year and tithing only upon crops and animals. But his boastful prayer never made it up to heaven to the one who could answer it, though this man never actually asked for anything. It was evident that the Pharisee believed that he obtained righteous standing with God through his religious works or perceived goodness. The tax collector on the other hand perceived that righteousness came only through God's power. His prayer reflected a humble and contrite heart. The deep contrast between the two men in the story illustrated the central truth of the parable. God calls believers to be reconciled to Himself through humble acceptance of their sinful position before Him. They are unable to earn their way to God but must accept Jesus' finished work on the cross in order to be found righteous before Him.

One of the defining doctrines of the New Testament is justification by faith and not by works. The topic of justification is found this in verse 14, "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home *justified* before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." The key word is "justified." This word in the New Testament is a legal term that means "a declaration of one to be innocent or just." A way to remember the biblical application of the word "justified" is the phrase, "Just as if I'd never sinned." When a person is declared just in the eyes of God, they are considered righteous such that they don't receive their rightful *penalty* for their sin. The source of a believer's righteousness is foreign, which means that it doesn't come from any of their own works or self-perceived goodness. God's righteousness can only come through the gateway of faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ. God has declared the universality of sin. Paul said, "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). He explained further in Romans that the proper payment for a life of sin was death, meaning eternal separation from God. However, with this bad news he also brought good news, literally the word in

the New Testament translated as "Gospel." "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). Paul explains that faith in Jesus is the mechanism through which the gift of eternal life is imparted to the believer. "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). Good works are important in serving the Lord and provide evidence of salvation, but they are not the *source* of our justification. Righteous standing before God can only be granted by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

Some questions may arise after this very brief study of justification. Some may ask, "Can we just keep on sinning since we believe and are going to heaven?" Paul answered quite succinctly in the Book of Romans. "*1 What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? 2 By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?*" (6:1-2). What about the role of works in our salvation? The Scripture is very clear that we cannot earn our salvation through our works, but works are very important because it's the method through which we serve the Lord Jesus. Finally, others may inquire, can we *know* that we have received salvation through faith in Jesus, isn't that being presumptuous? The Disciple John said, "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may *know* that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:13, emphasis added). Yes, you can know that you have received salvation. The Holy Spirit testifies to this fact. Paul said in Romans, "For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.' 16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children" (8:15-16). Having questions is normal and reveals that a person is really seeking the truth of Scripture. Paul said about this, "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you–unless, of course, you fail the test?" (1 Corinthians 13:5).

Reflection Questions

1. Justification through faith in God's grace is an important concept. Summarize your understanding of what justification means, why it is necessary for salvation and how one can be assured of their just standing before the LORD.

2. If you recognize that you, like the Pharisee, have been trusting in your good works to get you into right standing before God, take a moment and confess this wrong attitude in your heart to the LORD. First John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and to cleans us from all unrighteousness."

3. Review the bullet points about biblical Christianity from the discussion on the second reading. Which of the points address a specific question, concern or fear of your life? How does this truth provide you with comfort, hope or direction?

4. In what real relationships and real messes are you finding it hard to exercise real faith? How can Paul's example of fighting the good fight, longing for the appearing of the Lord, and forgiving those who hurt him be an inspiration for you? Take a moment and talk to the Lord about your situation. Ask him to stand by your side and give you strength, so that you too

might say—"To him be glory for ever and ever"!

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Mass-Study-Notes-for-Sunday_10-27-2019.pdfDownload

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 10-28-2018



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we open with a message of hope from the Prophet Jeremiah. The application is that although we as believers sin God will ultimately fulfill all of His promises to us including restoration and life with Him in a perfect kingdom. In the second reading from Hebrews, we examine Jesus' intercession for us as our eternal High Priest. We

conclude the lesson with Mark's story about Jesus' healing of a blind man named Bartimaeus.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from chapter 31 of the Book of Jeremiah. In Books like Jeremiah that combine history and prophecy, understanding the context is crucial to interpreting the text. In the reading Jeremiah finds himself in the midst of the aftermath of the first two exiles of the people of Judah to Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar. The third and final deportation and destruction of Jerusalem is on the near horizon at which time Jeremiah will find himself carried to Babylon with an intermediate stop along the way in Egypt. In the first and second deportations in 605 and 597 BC, the prophets Daniel and Ezekiel respectively were carried to Babylon to continue their prophetic writings from that far away country. Two chapters before today's reading Jeremiah brought a message of hope to the two previously exiled groups from Judah (the Southern Kingdom) in Babylon. God's instructions to the people through Jeremiah were to live normally and fruitfully in that distant land. They were to "Build houses and live in them; and plant gardens and eat their produce" and "Take wives and become the fathers of sons and daughters, and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; and multiply there and do not decrease" (Jeremiah 29:5.6). The Jews living as exiles in Babylon were to "Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf; for in its welfare you will have welfare" (v. 7).

First Reading:

> *Jeremiah 31:7-9 NAS95 7 For thus says the LORD, "Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob, And shout among the chief of the nations; Proclaim, give praise and say, 'O LORD, save Your people, The remnant of Israel.' 8 "Behold, I am bringing them from the north country, And I will gather them from the remote parts of the earth, Among them the blind and the lame, The woman with child and she who is in labor with child, together; A great company, they will return here. 9 "With weeping they will come, And by supplication I will lead them; I will make them walk by streams of waters, On a straight path in which they will not stumble; For I am a father to Israel, And Ephraim is My firstborn."*

Jeremiah spoke as God's anointed prophet to the southern tribes of Judah and therefore the reading begins with, "For thus says the LORD" (v. 7a). God had warned the people over and over again that unless they repented He would send them into captivity to atone for their sin. This message of hope was important to the exiles but Jeremiah continued his warnings to Judah that unless they repented God would take the rest of the people captive and destroy the city of Jerusalem along with the temple. The message in today's reading is one of hope to all of the exiles that God would one day restore them back to the land. It also provides hope to the exiles of the Northern Kingdom taken back in 722 BC by the Assyrians, although the message was written to Judah. The reading continues Jeremiah's proclamation about this future restoration. Just prior to this Jeremiah told the people, "For behold, days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'when I will restore the fortunes of My people

Israel and Judah.' The LORD says, 'I will also bring them back to the land that I gave to their forefathers and they shall possess it.'" (Jeremiah 30:3). Although the third and final exile had not yet happened, this message of hope was written to all of the exiles, as it was a foregone conclusion.

Jeremiah's message concerned hope in the future restoration of the people of Judah to the land. He said that the people "gather[ed] from the remote parts of the earth . . . A great company, they will return here" (v. 7). Although King Nebuchadnezzar had already deported two large groups from Judah to Babylon, the final destruction was due to come very soon with the siege of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple. Interestingly, God included the Northern Kingdom in this message about the future regathering and restoration of the Israelite people by mentioning "Ephraim is My firstborn" (v. 9). The Prophet Daniel, who was the first to be exiled to Babylon, said concerning the Southern Kingdom that the period of time which they would be held captive after this final event would be seventy years (Daniel 9:24). After these "seventy sevens" of years, Daniel said that a decree would be issued and that Jerusalem would be rebuilt and restored (Daniel 9:25). Jeremiah said the same thing just two chapters before the reading. "When seventy years have been completed for Babylon, I will visit you and fulfill My good word to you, to bring you back to this place" (Jeremiah 29:10). Ultimately, with the mention of Ephraim and a universal regathering of the Jews we must look to the future restoration of the entire kingdom of Israel under the reign of Jesus Christ that will happen upon His return. The big idea is that although the people had sinned, God would forgive their sin and complete the promises that He had made to them to inherit all of the Promised Land. The terms of His promises to them were confirmed in the various covenants. Although many of God's promises to Israel were tied to their inheritance of material blessings such as the land, the Bible is full of spiritual promises to them including salvation through their future Savior.

The application of Jeremiah's message for us today is that although "all of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23)," "if confess our sins God is faithful and just to forgive our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). We, like the Jews, continually miss the mark. We share in the message of hope that God will complete all of the promises that He has made to us. We cannot make the mistake as some have done by claiming the church has replaced Israel and that since God has forsaken Israel the church will inherit the promises that God made to them. Instead, God will make good both on His promises to Israel and on the promises He made to the church. *For more about God's promises to the church refer to the first study question.*

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from Chapter 5 of the Book of Hebrews. The overall message of the Book is the contrast between the Old and New Covenants. The Old Covenant was incomplete and imperfect in the sense that it came through the Levitical priesthood that was passing away because of its connection to mortal high priests. In contrast, the New Covenant is proffered through the eternal priesthood of Jesus Christ who is in the line of Melchizedek. This theme comes out very clearly in today's reading.

Second Reading:

> *Hebrews 5:1-6 NAS95 1 For every high priest taken from among men is appointed on behalf of men in things pertaining to God, in order to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins; 2 he can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness; 3 and because of it he is obligated to offer sacrifices for sins, as for the people, so also for himself. 4 And no one takes the honor to himself, but receives it when he is called by God, even as Aaron was. 5 So also Christ did not glorify Himself so as to become a high priest, but He who said to Him, "YOU ARE MY SON, TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU"; 6 just as He says also in another passage, "YOU ARE A PRIEST FOREVER ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK."*

The author explained how God in the Old Testament appointed the mortal, weak and misguided high priests of the Levitical line (Aaron) in order not only to offer sacrifices for other people but also for themselves (v. 3). In contrast, God the Father appointed Christ as our eternal High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek, not Aaron (v. 6). It's important to understand the man named Melchizedek mentioned in verse 5. The first time we find Melchizedek in the Bible is in Genesis 14:17-20 where we find him bringing out bread and wine to greet Abraham who was returning from battle with the forces that kidnapped his nephew Lot. Hebrews 7:1 says about this, "Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham as he was returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him." Looking at the book of Hebrews as a whole you can see that it's grounded in an explanation of Christ through the perspective of the Levitical Old Testament priesthood, thus the title given to the book "Hebrews" meaning Jews (see Genesis 14:3 where Abram, later called Abraham, the father of the Jews, is called a Hebrew). We see there in Hebrews 7:1 that Melchizedek is three things: 1. the king of Salem, the area we now identify as Jerusalem, 2. A priest of the "Most High God," meaning a priest of the *only* true God, and 3. one to whom Abraham the father of the Jews gave tribute. Today's reading said that Christ is of the "order of Melchizedek (v. 5), which is a quote from Psalms 110:4. According to the Book of Leviticus, all of the Old Testament Priests had to come from the tribe of Levi, but Melchizedek was a priest before the Law even existed! Yet Abraham gave a tenth portion (or tithe) to Melchizedek (Hebrews 7:4) as required under the later Law for all priests (verse 5). What is being explained here is that Melchizedek was one of a class of priests that foreshadowed the coming final, eternal High Priest, Jesus. Melchizedek, whose name means King of righteousness, could not have come from the line of Aaron (Levi) or Judah, because these did not exist during his lifetime. Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament sacrificial system, the final sacrifice was Jesus' own death on the cross which did away with the Levitical priesthood (Hebrews 10:11-14). Jesus was from the "order of Melchizedek" (Ps 110:4, Hebrews 7:17), not the line of Aaron. This is new order is made even more clear by reading beyond the quoted section of Psalm 110 to verse 7, "Therefore He will lift up his head." This eternal priest Jesus of the non-priestly line of Judah is and will be exalted by God. Melchizedek was the first biblical personality to picture the reality of a priest/king.

There are numerous implications for our lives relative to Jesus as The High Priest according to the line of Melchizedek. Jesus' ministry to us as the only intercessor between us and the Father (1 Timothy 2:5) is eternal. Second, we will never be subject to the frailties of a human priesthood because Jesus replaced the Levitical Priesthood forever. Since Jesus lived as a Man on earth, He can identify with the things that trouble us in this life. "For we do not have a high priest who cannot

sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). Jesus provides all who believe in Him with hope that one day our human weakness will be removed and we will be restored to a new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 21:1).

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel lesson is from Mark 10 and follows James and John's request to "Grant that we may sit, one on Your right and one on Your left, in Your glory" (Mark 10:37). Jesus taught them that they would suffer for Him, but it was not for them to choose their position as this was up to the will of His Father (Matthew 10:38-40). This discussion caused the other ten disciples to "feel indignant with James and John" (v. 41). Next, on their way to Jerusalem they stopped along the way in Jericho.

Gospel Reading:

> *Mark 10:46-52 NAS95 46 Then they came to Jericho. And as He was leaving Jericho with His disciples and a large crowd, a blind beggar named Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the road. 47 When he heard that it was Jesus the Nazarene, he began to cry out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" 48 Many were sternly telling him to be quiet, but he kept crying out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" 49 And Jesus stopped and said, "Call him here." So they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take courage, stand up! He is calling for you." 50 Throwing aside his cloak, he jumped up and came to Jesus. 51 And answering him, Jesus said, "What do you want Me to do for you?" And the blind man said to Him, "Rabboni, I want to regain my sight!" 52 And Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and began following Him on the road.*

The beggar named Bartimaeus is a name that means son of Timaeus, because "bar" means "son of." Blind people in this culture had few resources and were without any sort of social support systems so they frequently had to resort to begging. Bartimaeus took great initiative and jumped up on his own, the text doesn't say that someone else led him there. Twice he called to Jesus using the messianic title "Son of David." This indicated that he had some knowledge about who Jesus was. He recognized that Jesus was the only One that could open the eyes of the blind both in the physical sense but also spiritually as well through his use of the messianic title for Him. The blind man then heard the people calling to him and then threw away his cloak, possibly the only valuable possession that he owned. Bartimaeus not only received his sight but the text says that "his faith made him well" (v. 52), meaning that he also received the forgiveness of his sins as well. Afterwards he became a follower of Jesus, both literally and spiritually (v. 52).

What does this mean for us today? We too have to be willing to talk a bold step of faith and throw away our valuable possessions in order to find spiritual healing through Jesus. As former unbelievers, we too are blind to the reality of sin in our lives. Saint Paul says, "And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who

is the image of God" (2 Corinthians 4:3-4). There are many reasons that Jesus calls Himself the Light of the World (John 8:12) because as the Light He shines truth upon the spiritual darkness of our hearts. It is only through faith in Jesus that we receive spiritual life (Ephesians 2:8-9). Finally, we can praise God for this tremendous miracle of healing that he provided Bartimaeus in a culture where blind people were on the lowest rung of society. We can praise Him for all of the times that He has healed us and others around us, even if we were not aware of His intervention on our behalf.

Reflection Questions

1. In the first reading we said that God would make good on both His promises to Israel and His promises to the church. Reflect upon the following promises that God has made to you and how this provides you with hope during the troubled and shorts days of your earthly lifetime.

- Salvation to all who believe in His Son Jesus. "Romans 1:16-17 NAS95 16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'BUT THE RIGHTEOUS man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.'"
- God will work out all things for the our good as a believer. "Romans 8:28 NAS95 28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."
- As believers we receive a new life in Christ. "2 Corinthians 5:17 NAS95 17 Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come."
- God promises believers peace when they persist in calling upon Him in prayer. "Philippians 4:6-7 NAS95 6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

2. The Book of Hebrews begins with, "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe" (Hebrews 1:1-2). In what ways is Jesus as the truly eternal high priest / king (that fulfilled the requirements of the Law) the only possible One who can make intercession for us (1 Timothy 2:5)?

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 10-29-2017



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we open with the first reading from Moses' Book of Exodus in which we see God's concern for widows, orphans, and the poor. Then we move to the second reading, which is a continuation of the study we began last week from 1 Thessalonians. We conclude with another of Jesus' discussions with the Jewish leaders from the Gospel of Saint Matthew, this time with the infamous Pharisees.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from Chapter 22 of the Book of Exodus. This is one of the first five Books of the Bible known as the Pentateuch and was written by Moses. The Book is an account of God's sovereign rising of Moses as a leader to shepherd the Israelites out of their captivity in Israel. The Book also contains the chronicle of the giving of the Law to Moses including the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai. Anytime that the biblical texts use the term "Law" they mean the whole canon of the Jewish Law including the Ten Commandments and the other several hundred laws contained in the last four books of the Pentateuch: Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Chapter 20 contains the Ten Commandments and opens as follows. "Then God spoke all these words, saying, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." (Exodus 20:1-2). God, who calls Himself "I am" in verse one, meaning the "self-existent One," led the Israelites out of their bondage under the oppressive rule of the Pharaoh of Egypt through His ordained leader Moses. God gradually revealed the entire Canon of the Law to Moses during his wanderings in the desert.

Understanding today's reading requires some considerable insights into the cultural and religious milieu of Jews in the ancient near east. Foreigners were not the only downtrodden class of people to whom God afforded special protection in the Law. In those days there were three classes of people that were as low in the socioeconomic strata as foreigners were. These were widows, orphans, and the poor, although the first two certainly shared the characteristic of being poor. These groups of people had almost no rights in the secular kingdoms that surrounded Israel. However, we find throughout the Law God's special protection provided for these groups of people. The fact that God provides protection for the lower classes of people through the Law is an insight into God's very nature. We see in the Book of Psalms God's care for the poor. God says that He is "A father of the fatherless and a judge for the widows" (Psalms 68:5). The Psalmist said, "I know that the LORD will maintain the cause of the afflicted And justice for the poor" (Ps 140:12). "The LORD performs righteous deeds And judgments for all who are oppressed," the Psalmist said (Ps 103:6). God made special provisions for the protection of these classes of people throughout the Law. In Lev. 19:9–10 God provided special protection for strangers and the poor in providing for them through the gleanings in the corners of the fields. In Deut. 14:28–29 God provided special Laws for strangers, the fatherless, and widows. The Prophet Isaiah gave God's call to the Israelites to repent of their sin in the opening of his Book. God said, "Learn to do good; Seek justice, Reprove the ruthless, Defend the orphan, Plead for the widow" (Isaiah 1:17). This admonition appears multiple times throughout the Old Testament, and is in fact what James in the New Testament called "basic religion." He said, "Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world" (James 1:27).

As you read the text of the first reading, try to imagine what it would be like to have absolutely nothing along with no social standing in the ancient world. *Note: Verse 27 was included for the context.*

First Reading:

Ezekiel 22:20-26 NAS95 20 'As they gather silver and bronze and iron and lead and tin into the furnace to blow fire on it in order to melt it, so I will gather you in My anger and in My wrath and I will lay you there and melt you. 21 'I will gather you and blow on you with the fire of My wrath, and you will be melted in the midst of it. 22 'As silver is melted in the furnace, so you will be melted in the midst of it; and you will know that I, the LORD, have poured out My wrath on you.'" 23 And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, 24 "Son of man, say to her, 'You are a land that is not cleansed or rained on in the day of indignation.' 25 "There is a conspiracy of her prophets in her midst like a roaring lion tearing the prey. They have devoured lives; they have taken treasure and precious things; they have made many widows in the midst of her. 26 "Her priests have done violence to My law and have profaned My holy things; they have made no distinction between the holy and the profane, and they have not taught the difference between the unclean and the clean; and they hide their eyes from My sabbaths, and I am profaned among them.

The reading opens in verse 20, we find the often-repeated warning about idolatry. "He who sacrifices to any god, other than to the LORD alone, shall be utterly destroyed" (Exodus 20:20). In

the next verse, God introduces new teaching on proper treatment of aliens. God said, "You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Exodus 20:21). This time God gave a reason for treating foreigners properly, because the Israelites were once foreigners under the rule of the Pharaoh.

In the reading we see God's concern for widows (v. 22), orphans (v. 22), and the poor (v. 25). God said that He would hear the cries of the widows and the orphans and answer with judgment by allowing the people to be killed by their enemies with the sword (v. 24). This is something that was repeated over and over again throughout the Old Testament, especially in the era of the Judges. When times were good the people would begin to oppress the lower classes, then God would allow an alien nation to overtake the people. Then they would repent, God would raise up a deliver (for example a judge like Gideon in Judges 6), the people would again return to prosperity and the cycle would repeat. God's instruction about not oppressing the poor continued in verses 26-27 as neighbor took his neighbor's cloak as collateral for a loan. This person was so poor that the only thing that they had to pledge was their clothing. God knew that this was a dire situation and provided a clear principle that such essential items were not to be taken as collateral in loans among fellow Israelites. The principle is that when the poor neighbor is taken advantage of by being forced to pledge his essentials in order to survive that God will raise up a deliverer against the more prosperous man to bring judgment upon him for his unrighteous action. Instead, God said in Leviticus something that we shall study later in the Gospel lesson, "You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD" (Leviticus 19:18). Loving your neighbor in the case of what God said about not taking your neighbor's cloak as a pledge instead meant sharing in your abundance and that of the community.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

As we move onto the second reading, ask yourself what it means to act in full conviction of the Holy Spirit in response to the biblical precepts about serving Jesus and others? The Jews knew the Laws about not oppressing aliens, orphans and the poor, yet they didn't practice what was preached. You may have heard the cute acronym "J-O-Y" which means to consider our lives in light of the hierarchy of Jesus, others, and you. We should, as the teaching goes, consider Jesus first, then others, and finally ourselves. See what you can uncover from Saint Paul as your read his admonition on this subject of literally taking the Word to heart.

Second Reading:

5 for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. 6 You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, 7 so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. 8 For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say

anything. 9 For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, 10 and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come. (1 Thessalonians 1:5-10)

Paul told the Thessalonians how impressed he was with them because they didn't just do as he had told them to do ("word only," v. 5), but that they also carried out those things that he had directed them to do through the power of the Holy Spirit. Not only that, but they became examples to others (v. 7). The Thessalonians turned from the worship of idols as was the custom of their culture to the worship of the One True God (v. 9). Finally, Paul commended them for holding hope in the resurrection of the dead. When he said that Jesus "rescues us from the wrath to come" (v. 10) he was referring to the eternal punishment that was promised to the unbelievers in hell, not some sort of temporal deliverance or rapture (catching up) from their present circumstances. Later in the Book Paul did discuss how believers who were alive at the time when Jesus did return would be united with him in the clouds (1 Thessalonians 4:17), which is the context of the books and movie entitled *Left Behind* (we will cover that in a future lesson). The key point that Paul was making to the Thessalonians was his commendation for them for living out their Christian lives in word **and** in action, something that the Sadducees and Pharisees in the Gospel narrative hadn't learned.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

We saw in the second reading Saint Paul's admonition to take the Word to heart and his commendation to the Thessalonians for doing so. In the Gospel lesson today, we will see how Jesus summarized the Law into two key points that revealed the hypocrisy of the Pharisees hearts who didn't take the Word to heart. This lesson is another of Jesus' interactions with the Jewish ruling authorities during His inevitable journey to death at Calvary, this time with one of the Pharisees' best legal experts.

Gospel Reading:

34 But when the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered themselves together. 35 One of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, 36 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" 37 And He said to him, "'YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.' 38 This is the great and foremost commandment. 39 The second is like it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' 40 On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 22:34-40)

First, a bit about the context. When Matthew said, "But when the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees," he was referring to the story that happened just previously. Here the Sadducees, who didn't believe in the resurrection of the dead, had come to ask Jesus a theoretical expansion of the Levitical Law known as Levirate Marriage. They asked Jesus about the relationship in the resurrection between a certain woman and her chain of husbands afforded to her under the

Levirate Law. Remember that the Sadducees didn't believe in the resurrection, but they were just trying to trap Jesus. When they asked Jesus whose husband the woman would be in the resurrection after being married to seven different brothers Jesus answered them as follows.

29 But Jesus answered and said to them, "You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God. 30 For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. 31 But regarding the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God: 32 'I AM THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, AND THE GOD OF ISAAC, AND THE GOD OF JACOB'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living." 33 When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at His teaching. (Matthew 22:29-33)

The short-term silencing of the Sadducees provided the Pharisees with the opportunity to test Jesus for themselves. They asked Him, "which is the great commandment in the Law" (v. 36), again addressing Him with the honorable title of Rabbi (teacher). When the Pharisees use the term "Law" they are referring to the whole of the Old Testament. During that era, a frequent debate among the rabbis was which elements of the Law held the most weight and which ones could be given less weight or even discounted. Jesus' answer summarized the whole Canon of both the Law **and** the Prophetic writings. He answered them by quoting from the Levitical Law, "YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.' This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets" (vv. 38-40). Here, Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:5 or the "Shema," a phrase that religious Jews stated twice a day. He also quoted from Leviticus 19:18 that we mentioned in the discussion of the first reading.

What Jesus is saying is that a true follower of God is a unique whole being, one with a heart that is united in purpose (heart, soul, and mind) rather than compartmentalized into theoretical knowledge that does not lead to action. Loving God naturally leads us to keeping the commandments of God. Jesus said in John 14:23, "If anyone love Me, he will obey my teaching . . . ." Saint John continued Jesus' connection between love and action when He said, "Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue, but with action and in truth" (1 John 3:18). And again, "We love, because He first loved us. If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also" (1 John 4:19-21).

This was the heart of the indictment against the Pharisees. They were a group about which it could be said, "do as I say, but not as I do" as the expression goes. Love demands concrete action, not just correct information about God. This means to give help your neighbor when he needs help, not offer him a loan by taking his cloak as collateral as we saw in the first reading. Loving your neighbor as yourself also means loving yourself as one that was created in the image of God. This means caring for our bodies both spiritually and physically as a temple of the Holy Spirit.

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Reflection Questions

1. As your journey through the week, what does it look like for you to have a heart united in love and action for God? In our global society, what "neighbor" is God placing on your heart to help with a gift that doesn't require a loan and payment of collateral?

2. Spiritually, we are all as helpless as the orphans and widows of the ancient society. How do you respond to God's heart for you in your own spiritual poverty? What spiritual resources (see below) have you appropriated in your life? Which ones do you need to continue internalizing?

Spiritual Resources in Christ:

- I have been washed (1 Corinthians 6:11).
- I have been sanctified (set apart for special use) (1 Corinthians 6:11).
- I have been justified (pronounced "not guilty") (1 Corinthians 6:11)
- I have been forgiven of my sins (1 John 1:9)
- When I sin, I have an Advocate – Jesus Christ, who speaks to the Father in my defense (1 John 2:1)
- I am a new creation, the old has passed away and the new has come (2 Corinthians 5:17)
- I have been blessed in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ (Ephesians 1:3)
- I belong, I have been adopted, I have a spiritual family (Ephesians 1:5)
- I have resurrection power (Ephesians 1:19-20)
- I have God's grace that teaches me to say "no" to ungodliness and worldly passions and to live a self-controlled, upright and godly life (Titus 2:11-12, 1 Corinthians 10:13)

3. Read 1 Corinthians 10:1-14. Unpack the meaning of verse 13 in light of the context of the surrounding verses. How does this spiritual truth help you to live your life as a Christian in light of temptation?

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