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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 94: 06/21/2026



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week, we learn about suffering and persecution, first from the Prophet Jeremiah, then from Saint Paul and Jesus.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Prophet Jeremiah. This passage is set against the backdrop of Israel receiving dire consequences for rejecting God's rule in their lives. Jeremiah, a true prophet of God, had been beaten and mistreated by a false priest named Pashur (Jeremiah 20:1-2). While Jeremiah proclaimed a curse on Pashur in a veil of confidence, this section of our reading shows that inwardly he was troubled by the persecution he faced. This is Jeremiah's prayer of complaint before the LORD.

First Reading:

> *Jeremiah 20:10-13 NAS95 10 For I have heard the whispering of many, "Terror on every side! Denounce him; yes, let us denounce him!" All my trusted friends, Watching for my fall, say: "Perhaps he will be deceived, so that we may prevail against him And take our revenge on him." 11 But the LORD is with me like a dread champion; Therefore my persecutors will stumble and not prevail. They will be utterly ashamed, because they have failed, With an everlasting disgrace that will not be forgotten. 12 Yet, O LORD of hosts, You who test the righteous, Who see the mind and the heart; Let me see Your vengeance on them; For to You I have set forth my cause. 13 Sing to the LORD, praise the LORD! For He has delivered the soul of the needy one From the hand of evildoers.*

Jeremiah's suffering at the hands of an evil man provides an important lesson for those of us who follow after him. Just like Jeremiah, we cannot control how people treat us. But we can take our complaints to God and ask Him for justice and help.

Jeremiah was quite graphic in his lament, showing that he could be brutally honest with God about how he felt and what he was experiencing. He felt persecuted by his enemies and realized that even his friends had turned against him, waiting for him to mess up. Jeremiah was in a very, very difficult place, and could have relieved his suffering by denouncing the LORD and His ways. But he stood firm in his convictions, banking his life on the justice of God to prevail. These are some of the things that Jeremiah knew were true about God:

- God listens (otherwise he wouldn't waste his energy praying)
- God is a champion, which causes the enemy to fear
- God's justice will prevail in an everlasting way
- God is the LORD of armies (hosts)
- God tests the righteous

- God knows the minds and hearts of humans (we can't pull the wool over His eyes, so to speak)
- God will deliver vengeance upon the enemy
- God is worthy of praise, even in the midst of persecution and suffering
- God delivers the soul of the needy from the hand of evildoers

These important truths can sustain us in the midst of trials as well. Just as in Jeremiah's case, it may not seem like God is in control, but He is providing an opportunity for His children to walk by faith, not by sight. When we cannot see God, and it doesn't make sense to keep trusting Him, we are in a great test of faith. God highly values our faith (Hebrews 11:6) and allows trials to come into our lives so that we might internalize the reality of His existence, apart from receiving immediate rewards. That is why James says that we can "count" it all joy when we face trials of many kinds (James 1:2-3). For God is working to produce a higher vision in us—a vision of maturity and stability in Him that stays strong in spite of shifting circumstances.

Jeremiah's perspective can be our perspective as we encounter disappointing and debilitating things in this life.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

One of the debilitating experiences that all of us face is the loss of someone we love. At the loss of a loved one, many of us contemplate existential things: life, death, meaning, and purpose. We wonder why life has to end and whether there is meaning in our existence, if we will all end up in the grave at some point. These existential questions are dealt with in the New Testament passage. Saint Paul, in the Book of Romans, provides some background logic that helps explain the universal reality that we all face: death.

This reading is set in the context of explaining the power of the Good News: we can be free from the law of sin and death (Romans 6-8). Instead of feeling like paupers in the King's throne room, Christians can bask in the lavish grace of God. Paul carefully lays out the contrast between Adam's one sin, which affects all humans, and Jesus' free gift of eternal life that overcomes the grave and results in abundant and eternal life. The gift of eternal life is an overwhelming extension of God's heart towards wayward humans. Paul reminds the reader that God sent His righteous Son to die for unrighteous humans. "For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:7-8). God's grace is not stingy or miserly. It is abundant and overflowing.

Second Reading:

> *Romans 5:12-15 NAS95 12 Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned– 13 for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. 14 Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come. 15 But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many.*

Adam is the man through whom sin entered the world. In the Garden of Eden, Satan did not disclose to Adam the far-reaching and universal effects of his choice to live outside of God's provision. God had provided all of the trees in the garden for Adam and Eve's enjoyment, except for one (Genesis 2:16-17). The tree of the knowledge of good and evil was excluded from their experience because the Lord knew that determining what is right and wrong was His responsibility. But Adam stepped outside of God's protective covering and ate of the "forbidden fruit," thus exposing himself to a world he was ill-equipped to handle. While the effects of physical death were not realized immediately (Adam lived to be 930 years old according to Genesis 5:3-4), a spiritual death occurred instantly. Previously, they were naked and unashamed, but now "the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked" (Genesis 3:7).

Because Adam represented all of humankind and gave us a sin nature, all of humankind receives the mark of death. God is not being mean-spirited in allowing death to reign in this world; He is merely being consistent with the laws He had set forth from the beginning. A life apart from Him results in death. Life with Him and in Him results in eternal life.

In this passage, the Apostle Paul explains that everyone has sinned, even those who lived before the Law was established through Moses. In the days before Moses, people were still reaping the effects of sin, i.e. death, even though God had not given them the Ten Commandments. After Moses and the Law, people were not able to follow God better; they just were more aware of how far short they were missing the mark (Romans 3:23). Paul's point is that either way you slice it (before or after the Law), people have been reaping the tragic effects of sin.

One of the greatest words in the Bible is the word "but," which appears here in our passage as a turning point in the universal experience of the tragedy of death. Paul is almost overflowing with enthusiasm as he recounts the abundant grace of God displayed in Christ Jesus, the One who "was to come" (v. 14). For if Adam's sin permeated all of humanity to bring death into the world, how much more would Christ's life counteract this tragedy and actually re-tell the story of humanity, showering us as actors in the story with the possibility of redemption. The grace of God does not just cancel the many debts; it provides richly for those who accept the free gift offered in Christ. We do not have to quiver before God the Father if we are in Christ, for He has provided grace upon grace (more than enough) to root us and establish us in His love. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1). This is a game-changer, for in Christ, the story of our lives can have meaning and purpose, not just here but for all eternity. Death is not the final chapter and no longer deals a tragic sting (1 Corinthians 15:55). This is the victory that is ours in Christ!

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

Because we have such a great Savior, who has justified us though our sins were many, our loyalty to Him should far outweigh our loyalty to our own physical comfort or ease in this life. The cost of discipleship is not hard to pay when we realize what a great salvation He has provided for us.

The cost of discipleship is something the Gospel reading addresses today. One of Jesus' most strategic ways of making a lasting impact in the world was to "disciple" a group of people in His way of life. He spent time with them and taught them about life in the kingdom of God, which was in sharp contrast to their lives lived under their own reign. In this Gospel reading, Jesus was preparing His 12 disciples to go out and teach others what He had taught them. "Jesus summoned His twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness "(Matthew 10:1). He gave them specific instructions that would help them to be ambassadors for God's redemptive purposes in the world. He also warned them that the road of discipleship would not be easy. They would be persecuted, questioned, and hated (Matthew 10:17-25). The only way they could move forward would be to know the truth claims Jesus

makes in the following verses.

Gospel Reading:

> *Matthew 10:26-33 NAS95 26 Therefore do not fear them, for there is nothing concealed that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. 27 What I tell you in the darkness, speak in the light; and what you hear whispered in your ear, proclaim upon the housetops. 28 Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. 29 Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. 30 "But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. 31 So do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows. 32 Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. 33 But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven.*

Jesus gave the disciples support to help them overcome the trial of persecution that awaited them. The big idea of this passage was to share an eternal perspective that would give them comfort when they are wrongly treated for the sake of Christ. He reassured them that God, who is eternal, was keeping track of the injustices of this life and would hold humans responsible for their choice to be disloyal to Christ.

Jesus communicated several important points that can help each of us, who consider ourselves His disciples, as we face ill-treatment for the sake of Christ. First, He said not to fear those who mistreat us. Fear is only legitimate if there is no life after death. If this life is all there is, then we will find that the values of the Christian life are untenable. But because there is a God, who is eternal, and because He has made a way for us to live with Him, we can live our lives on earth with an eternal perspective. Jesus reminded his followers that there will be a day of reckoning and that God's final evaluation of a life is the only thing to fear. If evil people get away with things on this side of eternity, that is not the end of the story. Therefore, we can have confidence to share the truth of Jesus' teachings, even if it brings persecution and ill-treatment.

Second, since God sees and knows the smallest details of our lives (how many hairs on our head), how much more then is He acquainted with the most important details of our lives? If God can keep track of the little things (sparrows), He surely is capable of keeping track of the bigger things. When we are suffering, Satan would like us to believe that God does not care about us and has lost track of

what is best for us. These verses counteract that lie by pulling back the veil to see the supernatural realm, where God, who sits on the throne, is actually intimately acquainted with the details of our lives. This truth can provide comfort and hope in the midst of trials and persecution for the believer in Christ. This truth should also be a warning for those who abuse God's people, for their evil deeds will not go unpunished.

The main point Jesus wraps up with is a reminder that our loyalty needs to be affixed to Him, no matter the pressure on us. We may be presented with an easier road if we stay silent about our relationship with Christ, or we may even have our physical life spared if we deny Him. But we will forfeit our eternal soul, which is far worse than losing our physical life. Loyalty to Jesus in this life will translate into His vouching for us before the throne of the Father, thus atoning for our lack of righteousness in this life. That is called grace. But if we deny what Jesus has done on our behalf by rejecting Him in this life before men, there is no other way to the Father's heart and eternal rest for our souls. In another place, Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father, but through me" (John 14:6). The centrality of Christ for eternal salvation is very clearly stated by Jesus in this and other passages. It is important that we prioritize this relationship above all other pursuits and pressures. That is what true discipleship looks like.

Reflection Questions

1. Review the list of attributes of God in the first reading that Jeremiah is banking on. What attributes are you having trouble believing are true about God based on your current or past circumstances? Talk to God about your desire to walk by faith in these truths, asking Him to help you to believe He is faithful to His Word. You might even have a spiritual friend to share this struggle with and to ask for prayer support in growing in living by the Truth.

2. As you think about the pressures you face to deny Christ, what form does persecution take in your life? What are the costs of discipleship? How can reflecting on the abundant grace of God from Romans 5 help you to count the cost of discipleship and stay loyal to Christ in the midst of persecution? How does the loyalty of Christ to you engender loyalty back to Him?

Sunday Mass Study Notes for 06-23-2024



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In the first reading, Job, the ancient Old Testament believer, was visited by the awesome God, and was dumbstruck. When Jesus spoke to Saul from heaven (Acts 9:3), the church's chief persecutor fell to the ground in recognition of who Jesus was. Afterwards, in his New Testament writings, then known as Paul, the Apostle shares much about the purpose of Jesus' coming and how it affects those who come to faith in Christ. Finally, we see an aspect of Jesus' life revealed through the Gospel reading. Jesus certified that He was the promised Messiah through the demonstration of His miraculous power over the physical, natural, and spiritual constraints of life.

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Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from what many consider to be the oldest book in the Bible. *Note: Verses 2 – 7 which were omitted in the original reading are included here in order to provide the full context and meaning.*

First Reading

> *Job 38:1-11 NAS95 1 Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said, 2 "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? 3 Now gird up your loins like a man, And I will ask you, and you instruct Me! 4 Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding, 5 Who set its measurements? Since you know. Or who stretched the line on it? 6 On what were its bases sunk? Or who laid its cornerstone, 7 When the morning stars sang together And all the sons of God shouted for joy? 8 Or who enclosed the sea with doors When, bursting forth, it went out from the womb; 9 When I made a cloud its garment And thick darkness its swaddling band, 10 And I placed boundaries on it And set a bolt and doors, 11 And I said, 'Thus far you shall come, but no farther; And here shall your proud waves stop'?*

The story of Job is familiar to most Christians. He was a righteous man who honored God and served his fellow men by helping in their times of distress or need. Satan approached God and wanted to test Job, claiming that he was faithful to God only because he was richly blessed in material and physical ways. God allowed Satan to test Job and the patriarch suffered the loss of crops, possessions, and his children. It's difficult to imagine the pain and suffering of this saint, and what made it worse was the counsel he received from his so-called friends. They accused him of some failure or sin that brought God's judgment upon him. He remained true, however, claiming "I know that my redeemer lives," (Job 19:25).

In the midst of his suffering, Job lamented, "If only there were someone to mediate between us, someone to bring us together" (Job 9:33). His plea is answered in the New Testament, where Paul wrote, "For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5). Little did Job understand that God's plan was to ultimately redeem lost mankind.

Today's reading presents the end of the Job's story. God appears to him and asks a series of rhetorical questions; which Job couldn't answer. Instead, he responds as anyone would in the

presence of almighty God: "I am unworthy—how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth. I spoke once, but I have no answer—twice, but I will say no more" (Job 40:4-5) and "*My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore, I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes*" (Job 42:5-6).

What should we take away from this reading? In the presence of God, we mortals are sinful and undeserving. In contrast, God is the great Creator, the almighty God who is worthy of worship. The next reading will reveal God's plan to restore sinful man to Himself.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from one of the Apostle Paul's letter to the church in the city of Corinth. *Note: Verses 18 – 21 which were omitted from the original reading are included here in order to provide the full context and meaning.*

Second Reading

> *2 Corinthians 5:14-21 NAS95 14 For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; 15 and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf. 16 Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him in this way no longer. 17 Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. 18 Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, 19 namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. 20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 21 He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*

Paul emphasizes that Jesus died for lost mankind with the purpose that redeemed men would not live for themselves (which is the natural instinct of men) but would live for Christ. He is worthy of such commitment because He suffered a humiliating death, paying the awful price for our sin, and rose from the dead as proof positive that God's demand had been paid fully.

The Apostle goes on to emphasize the significant transformation that occurs when a sinner confesses Jesus as Lord and Savior. It isn't that the convert has merely changed, but he is a new creature; he has been transformed. That's a word that describes the change that occurs when a chrysalis becomes a butterfly. Wow! It's a radical difference in nature. And because the believer has been changed, his whole life is changed. He no longer yearns for the things of his former, unconverted life. Rather, he finds everything is new, and his affections, motivations, and actions are now committed to Jesus.

What's more, the Christian now becomes an official representative of Christ on earth. Just as the sinner was reconciled to God by faith, he now is to be an ambassador for Christ, a minister of reconciliation to the lost world. God desires to use the Christian as His spokesman to share the good news of God's grace.

Paul concludes the paragraph with a startling statement about what it cost Jesus to become a satisfactory sacrifice for sin. It's hard to think of Jesus as becoming sin for us, but that's what the text says. Only by His accepting all our sin (He had none of His own) could that sin be washed away by the sacrifice of His life. As a result, by faith, we can "become the righteousness of God in Him." Praise God!

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

Today's Gospel reading is from Saint Mark. Jesus had been teaching the multitude, using parables—stories that illustrate truth. Everyone likes stories, and Jesus could teach deep, spiritual realities by using familiar scenes and events. He had spoken of the sower whose seed fell on various kinds of soil with differing results. As he told His disciples, many hearers would not understand but He explained the teaching to them. On this occasion he used many parables and explained them to the Twelve (Mark 4:33).

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> *Mark 4:35-41 NAS95 35 On that day, when evening came, He said to them, "Let us go over to the other side." 36 Leaving the crowd, they took Him along with them in the boat, just as He was; and other boats were with Him. 37 And there arose a fierce gale of wind, and the waves were breaking over the boat so much that the boat was already filling up. 38 Jesus Himself was*

> *in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?" 39 And He got up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Hush, be still." And the wind died down and it became perfectly calm. 40 And He said to them, "Why are you afraid? How is it that you have no faith?" 41 They became very much afraid and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?"*

Jesus was no doubt tired from the day of teaching (after all He was human), He instructed the disciples to go with Him to the other side of the lake. As they sailed, Jesus went to the back of the boat and slept. A terrible storm arose, and the disciples, fearing for their lives, awoke Jesus. We don't know what they intended Him to do, but He rebuked them for their lack of faith. Then, He performed a powerful miracle, ordering the wind and the sea to be calm. Immediately, the storm died down and everything became completely calm. Who could imagine that anyone could stop a storm by merely speaking to it?

Wondering among themselves, the disciples asked each other, "Who is this?" "Even the wind and the sea obey Him." As in the reading from Job and 2 Corinthians, we are faced once again with the all-powerful God. Jesus was not only 100% human; He was 100% God. He did not give up His deity when He was born on this earth. Jesus performed miracles of healing, raising the dead, casting out demons, and ordering the weather—all of which were the proof that He, indeed, was the promised Messiah who was to come to redeem His people, giving signs of His authority by the miracles He performed. When we read the Gospels, we are not merely reading exciting stories, we are being introduced to the very Creator God who sent His Son to save us.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. How would you react if God were to appear to you as He did to Job? Would you be proud that He spoke to you, or how would you respond?

2. In what ways have you accepted your role as an ambassador for Christ, trying to bring others to reconcile with God? List two or three actions that you have taken over the past six months.

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Jesus was no doubt tired from the day of teaching (after all He was human), He instructed the disciples to go with Him to the other side of the lake. As they sailed, Jesus went to the back of the boat and slept. A terrible storm arose, and the disciples, fearing for their lives, awoke Jesus. We don't know what they intended Him to do, but He rebuked them for their lack of faith. Then, He performed a powerful miracle, ordering the wind and the sea to be calm. Immediately, the storm died down and everything became completely calm. Who could imagine that anyone could stop a storm by merely speaking to it?

Wondering among themselves, the disciples asked each other, "Who is this?" "Even the wind and the sea obey Him." As in the reading from Job and 2 Corinthians, we are faced once again with the all-powerful God. Jesus was not only 100% human; He was 100% God. He did not give up His deity when He was born on this earth. Jesus performed miracles of healing, raising the dead, casting out demons, and ordering the weather—all of which were the proof that He, indeed, was the promised Messiah who was to come to redeem His people, giving signs of His authority by the miracles He performed. When we read the Gospels, we are not merely reading exciting stories, we are being introduced to the very Creator God who sent His Son to save us.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. How would you react if God were to appear to you as He did to Job? Would you be proud that He spoke to you or would you respond with reverent fear and repentance?

Sunday Mass Study Notes for 06-21-2020

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we learn about suffering and persecution, first from the Prophet Jeremiah, then from Saint Paul and Jesus.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Prophet Jeremiah. This passage is set amongst the backdrop of Israel receiving dire consequences for rejecting God's rule in their lives. Jeremiah, a true prophet of God, had been beaten and mistreated by a false priest named Pashur (Jeremiah 20:1-2). While Jeremiah proclaimed cursing on Pashur in a veil of confidence, this section of verses in our reading shows that inwardly he was troubled by the persecution he faced. This is Jeremiah's prayer of complaint before the LORD.

First Reading:

Jeremiah 20:10-13 NAS95 10 For I have heard the whispering of many, "Terror on every side! Denounce him; yes, let us denounce him!" All my trusted friends, Watching for my fall, say: "Perhaps

he will be deceived, so that we may prevail against him And take our revenge on him." 11 But the LORD is with me like a dread champion; Therefore my persecutors will stumble and not prevail. They will be utterly ashamed, because they have failed, With an everlasting disgrace that will not be forgotten. 12 Yet, O LORD of hosts, You who test the righteous, Who see the mind and the heart; Let me see Your vengeance on them; For to You I have set forth my cause. 13 Sing to the LORD, praise the LORD! For He has delivered the soul of the needy one From the hand of evildoers.

Jeremiah's suffering at the hands of an evil man provide an important lesson for those of us who follow after him. Just like Jeremiah, we cannot control how people treat us. But we can take our complaints to God and ask Him for justice and help.

Jeremiah was quite graphic in his lament, showing that he could be brutally honest with God about how he felt and what he was experiencing. He felt persecuted by his enemies and realized that even his friends had turned against him, waiting for him to mess up. Jeremiah was in a very, very difficult place, and could have relieved his suffering by denouncing the LORD and His ways. But he stood firm in his convictions, banking his life on the justice of God to prevail. These are some of the things that Jeremiah knew were true about God:

- God listens (otherwise he wouldn't waste his energy praying)
- God is a champion, which causes the enemy to fear
- God's justice will prevail in an everlasting way
- God is the LORD of armies (hosts)
- God tests the righteous
- God knows the mind and heart of humans (we can't pull the wool over His eyes, so to speak)
- God will deliver vengeance upon the enemy
- God is worthy of praise, even in the midst of persecution and suffering
- God delivers the soul of the needy from the hand of evildoers

These important truths can sustain us in the midst of trials as well. Just like in Jeremiah's case, it may not seem like God is in control, but He is providing an opportunity for His children to walk by faith and not by sight. When we cannot see God, and it doesn't make sense to keep trusting Him, we are in a great test of faith. God highly values our faith (Hebrews 11:6) and will allow trials to come into our lives so that we might internalize the reality of His existence apart from receiving immediate rewards. That is why James says that we can "count" it all joy when we face trials of many kinds (James 1:2-3). For God is working to produce a higher vision in us—a vision of maturity and stability in Him that stays strong in spite of shifting circumstances.

Jeremiah's perspective can be our perspective as we encounter disappointing and debilitating things in this life.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

One of the debilitating experiences that all of us face is the loss of someone we love. At the loss of a loved one, many of us contemplate existential things: life, death, meaning, and purpose. We wonder why life has to end and whether there is meaning in our existence, if we will all end up in the grave at some point. These existential questions are dealt with in the New Testament passage. Saint Paul, in the Book of Romans, provides some background logic that helps explain the universal reality that we all face: death.

This reading is set in the context of explaining the power of the Good News, which is that we can be free from the law of sin and death (Romans 6-8). Instead of feeling like paupers in the throne room of the King, Christians can bask in the lavish grace given by God. Paul carefully lays out the contrast between Adam's one sin, which affects all humans and Jesus' free gift of eternal life that overcomes the grave and results in abundant and eternal life. The gift of eternal life is an overwhelming extension of God's heart towards wayward humans. Paul reminds the reader that God sent His righteous Son to die for unrighteous humans. "For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:7-8). God's grace is not stingy or miserly. It is abundant and overflowing.

Second Reading:

Romans 5:12-15 NAS95 12 Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned– 13 for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. 14 Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come. 15 But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many.

Adam is the man through whom sin entered the world. In the Garden of Eden, Satan did not disclose to Adam the far-reaching and universal effects of his choice to live outside of God's provision. God had provided all of the trees in the garden for Adam and Eve's enjoyment, except for one (Genesis 2:16-17). The tree of the knowledge of good and evil was excluded from their experience because the Lord knew that determining what is right and wrong was His responsibility. But Adam stepped outside of God's protective covering, and ate of the "forbidden fruit," thus exposing himself to a world he was ill-equipped to handle. While the effects of physical death were not realized immediately (Adam lived to be 930 years old according to Genesis 5:3-4), a spiritual death occurred instantly. Previously, they were naked and unashamed, but now "the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked" (Genesis 3:7).

Because Adam represented all of humankind and gave to us a sin nature, all of humankind receives the mark of death. God is not being mean-spirited in allowing death to reign in this world, He is merely being consistent with the laws He had set forth from the beginning. Life apart from Him results in death. Life with Him and in Him results in eternal life.

In this passage, the Apostle Paul explains that everyone has sinned, even those who lived before the Law was established through Moses. In the days before Moses, people were still reaping the effects of sin, i.e. death, even though God had not given them the Ten Commandments. After Moses and the Law, people were not able to follow God better, they just were more aware of how far short they were missing the mark (Romans 3:23). Paul's point is that either way you slice it (before or after the Law), people have been reaping the tragic effects of sin.

One of the greatest words in the Bible is the word "but" which shows up here in our passage as a huge turning point in the universal experience of the tragedy of death. Paul is almost overflowing with enthusiasm as he recounts the abundant grace of God displayed in Christ Jesus, the One who "was to come" (v. 14). For if Adam's sin permeated all of humanity to bring death into the world, how much more would Christ's life counteract this tragedy and actually re-tell the story of humanity, showering us as actors in the story with the possibility of redemption. The grace of God does not just cancel the many debts, it provides richly for those who accept the free gift offered in Christ. We do not have to quiver before God the Father if we are in Christ, for He has provided grace upon grace (more than enough) to root us and establish us in His love. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1). This is a game-changer, for in Christ, the story of our lives can have meaning and purpose, not just here but for all eternity. Death is not the final chapter and no longer deals a tragic sting (1 Corinthians 15:55). This is the victory that is ours in Christ!

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Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

Because we have such a great Savior, who has justified us though our sins were many, our loyalty to Him should far outweigh our loyalty to our own physical comfort or ease in this life. The cost of discipleship is not hard to pay when we realize what a great salvation He has provided for us.

The cost of discipleship is something about which the Gospel reading deals. One of Jesus' most strategic ways of making a lasting impact in the world was to "disciple" a group of people in His way of life. He spent time with them and taught them about life in the kingdom of God, which was in sharp contrast to life lived under one's own reign. In the Gospel reading for this week, Jesus was preparing his 12 disciples to go out and teach others what they had been taught by Him. "Jesus summoned His twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness "(Matthew 10:1). He gave them specific instructions which would help them to be ambassadors for God's redemptive purposes in the world. He also warned them that the road of discipleship would not be easy. They would be persecuted, questioned, and hated (Matthew 10:17-25). The only way that they could move forward would be to know the truth claims that Jesus' would state in the following verses.

Gospel Reading:

Matthew 10:26-33 NAS95 26 Therefore do not fear them, for there is nothing concealed that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. 27 What I tell you in the darkness, speak in the light; and what you hear whispered in your ear, proclaim upon the housetops. 28 Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. 29 Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. 30 "But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. 31 So do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows. 32 Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. 33 But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven.

Jesus gave the disciples support to help them overcome the trial of persecution that awaited them. The big idea of this passage was to share an eternal perspective that would give them comfort when they are wrongly treated for the sake of Christ. He reassured them that God, who is eternal, was keeping track of the injustices of this life and would hold humans responsible for their choice to be disloyal to Christ.

Jesus communicated several important points that can help each of us, who consider ourselves His disciples, as we face ill-treatment for the sake of Christ. First, He said to not fear those who mistreat us. Fear is only legitimate if there is no life after death. If this life is all there is, then we will find that the values of the Christian life are untenable. But because there is a God, who is eternal, and because He has made a way for us to live with Him, we can live our lives on earth with an eternal perspective. Jesus reminded his followers that there will be a day of reckoning and that God's final evaluation of a life is the only thing to fear. If evil people get away with things on this side of eternity, that is not the end of the story. Therefore, we can have confidence to share the truth of Jesus' teachings, even if it brings persecution and ill-treatment.

Second, since God sees and knows the smallest details of our lives (how many hairs on our head), how much more, then is He acquainted with the most important details of our lives? If God can keep track of the little things (sparrows), He surely is capable of keeping track of the bigger things. When we are suffering, Satan would like us to believe that God does not care about us and has lost track of what is best for us. These verses counteract that lie by pulling back the veil to see the supernatural realm, where God, who sits on the throne is actually intimately acquainted with the details of our lives. This truth can provide comfort and hope in the midst of trials and persecution for the believer in Christ. This truth should also be a warning for those who abuse God's people, for their evil deeds will not go unpunished.

The main point that Jesus wraps up with is the reminder that our loyalty needs to be affixed to Him, no matter what pressure is on us. We may be presented with an easier road if we stay silent about our relationship with Christ, or we may even have our physical life spared if we deny Him. But we will forfeit our eternal soul—which is far worse than losing our physical life. Loyalty to Jesus in this life will translate into His vouching for us before the throne of the Father, thus atoning for our lack of righteousness in this life. That is called grace. But if we deny what Jesus has done on our behalf by rejecting Him in this life before men, there is no other way to the Father's heart and eternal rest for our soul. In another place, Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father, but through me" (John 14:6). The centrality of Christ for eternal salvation is very clearly stated by Jesus in this and other passages. It is important that we prioritize this relationship above all other pursuits and pressures. That is what true discipleship looks like.

Reflection Questions

1. Review the list of attributes of God in the first reading that Jeremiah is banking on. What attributes are you having trouble believing are true about God based on your current or past

circumstances? Talk to God about your desire to walk by faith in these truths, asking Him to help you to believe He is faithful to His Word. You might even have a spiritual friend to share this struggle with and ask for prayer support to grow in living by Truth.

2. As you think about the pressures you face to deny Christ, what form does persecution take in your life? What are the costs of discipleship? How can reflecting on the abundant grace of God from Romans 5 help you to count the cost of discipleship and stay loyal to Christ in the midst of persecution? How does the loyalty of Christ to you engender loyalty back to Him?

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 6-25-2017



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The first reading is from the Prophet Jeremiah. This passage is set amongst the backdrop of Israel receiving dire consequences for rejecting God's rule in their lives. Jeremiah, a true prophet of God, had been beaten and mistreated by a false priest named Pashur (Jeremiah 20:1-2). While Jeremiah proclaimed cursing on Pashur in a veil of confidence, this section of verses in our reading shows that inwardly he was troubled by the persecution he faced. This is Jeremiah's prayer of complaint before the LORD.

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This reading is set in the context of explaining the power of the Good News, which is that we can be free from the law of sin and death (Romans 6-8). Instead of feeling like paupers in the throne room of the King, Christians can bask in the lavish grace given by God. Paul carefully lays out the contrast between Adam's one sin, which affects all humans and Jesus' free gift of eternal life that overcomes the grave and results in abundant and eternal life. The gift of eternal life is an overwhelming extension of God's heart towards wayward humans. Paul reminds the reader that God sent His righteous Son to die for unrighteous humans. "For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:7-8). God's grace is not stingy or miserly. It is abundant and overflowing.

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