

Sunday, August 13, 2017

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading: 1 Kings 19:9, 11-13

2nd Reading: Romans 9:1-5

Responsorial: Psalm 85:9-14

Gospel: Matthew 14:22-23

Being Bold in Following the Lord and Serving Him

O you of little faith. (Matthew 14:31)

Have you ever seen a toddler take a few wobbly steps and then tumble to the ground? You would probably be shocked if you saw his mother or father angrily rebuke him for falling. That's not what parents do. They bend down with a smile to lift the child up, embrace him, and encourage him to try again.

That's a great way to understand Jesus' words to his disciples in today's Gospel. He loves them. He loves Peter's bold attempt to walk toward him on the waves. He knows that Peter is taking an important step toward a confident mature faith. He also knows that Peter's flop into the water won't be the end of the story. Far from being a failure or a disaster, it will become a milestone on his journey of discipleship. Yes, Peter had "little faith," but he did have faith!

Jesus looks at us with love when he sees our attempts to follow him. He applauds our successes, and he reaches out to help us when we fail. He is quick to come to our aid if we take a misstep or start to doubt. He knows that each step reflects our growth toward maturity.

Try something new today, just as Peter did. You probably won't want to step out onto your nearest body of water, but there are plenty of other things you can do. Just choose one. Think about something that might have arisen in your thoughts recently. Perhaps you would like to help the less fortunate; try it. You could set up one time to volunteer to serve meals to the homeless. You don't need to have the perfect words to say to the people you'll meet. Just take that first step. Jesus will be with you, ready to lift you up if you stumble.

You may be surprised to find that trying something new strengthens your "little faith" and brings you closer to Jesus.

"Thank you, Jesus, that you look at me with love. Make me bold to try to follow you in a new way today. I believe that you will be with me."

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Questions for Reflection or Discussion:

1. The first reading begins with these words: “At the mountain of God, Horeb, Elijah came to a cave where he took shelter. Then the LORD said to him, ‘Go outside and stand on the mountain before the LORD; the LORD will be passing by.’” After not seeing the Lord in a strong and heavy wind, earthquake, or fire, “there was a tiny whispering sound. When he heard this, Elijah hid his face in his cloak and went and stood at the entrance of the cave.”
 - Why do you think the Lord, the Creator of the universe, would talk so softly to Elijah in a “tiny whispering sound” instead of in a more dramatic way?
 - Has there ever been a time when you felt you heard from God during a time of prayer? What was the result?
2. The responsorial psalm also begins by speaking of hearing the Lord: “I will hear what God proclaims; the LORD — for he proclaims peace. Near indeed is his salvation to those who fear him, glory dwelling in our land.” The responsorial psalm goes on to describe, in very symbolic terms, what are the fruits of what the Lord proclaims.
 - Fear of the Lord is often defined as reverence for the Lord. Why do you think having a reverence for the Lord is important to “hear what God proclaims”?
 - What is the psalmist trying to convey with his description of the fruits of what the Lord proclaims?
 - Has there ever been a time when you felt you heard from God during a time of prayer? What was the result?
3. In the second reading, St. Paul expresses his “great sorrow and constant anguish” for the salvation of the Jewish people, even to the point of being willing to be “accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh.” St. Paul then explains what Christians have inherited from the Jewish people.
 - Why do you think Paul was willing to make such a personal sacrifice for the sake of the Jewish people?
 - In light of Paul’s words, what is your understanding of why we as Christians should be so grateful to the Jewish people for what we have inherited from them?
 - What are some ways you can express your thankfulness for this “inheritance” to some Jewish people you know?
4. In the Gospel reading, Jesus walks on water and when his disciples in the boat see him, “they were terrified.” He then speaks these words to his disciples, “Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid.”
 - Do you believe that Jesus wants to speak these same words of assurance to you as well, especially when you are anxious or going through a difficult situation?
 - What can keep you from hearing Jesus’ words of assurance, and how can you overcome them?
5. The Gospel reading continues with these words: “Peter said to him in reply, ‘Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.’ He said, ‘Come.’ Peter got out of the boat and began to walk on the water toward Jesus. But when he saw how strong the wind was he became frightened; and, beginning to sink, he cried out, ‘Lord, save me!’ Immediately Jesus stretched out his hand and caught Peter, and said to him, ‘O you of little faith, why did you doubt?’” The message conveyed by these words seems to be to listen to Jesus, have faith, and keep your eyes fixed on him when you are going through difficult times.
 - What are the obstacles that can keep you from applying this Gospel message to your life?
 - How can you overcome these obstacles?
6. The Gospel reading ends with these words: “After they got into the boat, the wind died down. Those who were in the boat did him homage, saying, ‘Truly, you are the Son of God.’”
 - Why do you think the apostles were able to make this great statement of faith: “Truly, you are the Son of God”?
 - In what ways has your faith increased when you see the Lord act in your life or other people’s lives?
7. The meditation challenges us with these words: “Try something new today, just as Peter did. You probably won’t want to step out onto your nearest body of water, but there are plenty of other things you can do. Just choose one.” It then provides several possible choices and ends with these words: “You may be surprised to find that trying something new strengthens your ‘little faith’ and brings you closer to Jesus.”
 - What is something “new” you can do to serve more in your parish?
 - If you can’t think of any, are you willing to pray and ask the Lord to reveal new opportunities to serve him?
8. Take some time now to pray and ask the Lord for the boldness to step out in faith to follow him and serve him in a new way. Use the prayer below from the end of the meditation as the starting point.

“Thank you, Jesus, that you look at me with love. Make me bold to try to follow you in a new way today. I believe that you will be with me.”

[The discussion questions were created by Maurice Blumberg, who is in partner relations for **The Word Among Us Partners**, (<http://www.waupartners.org/>); a ministry of **The Word Among Us** (www.wau.org) to the military, prisoners, women with crisis pregnancies or who have had abortions, and college students. He

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