

Sunday, January 28, 2018

4th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading: Deuteronomy 18:15-20

2nd Reading: 1 Corinthians 7:32-35

Responsorial: Psalm 95:1-2, 6-9

Gospel: Mark 1:21-28

Opening Our Hearts to Hear Jesus Speaking to Us

A new teaching with authority . . . (Mark 1:27)

You know when you see empty words. A celebrity issues a halfhearted apology for an indiscretion caught on videotape. An athlete hedges his stance on a controversial issue for fear of upsetting some sponsors. A grade school student offers made-up excuses for incomplete homework. Someone is not being completely straightforward, and it puts us on alert. If they keep on acting this way, we find it hard to take seriously anything they say. Their words have lost authority, and we know it.

This is the exact opposite of how the people in the synagogue had reacted after they heard Jesus teach. He was the real deal! There was no evasion or beating around the bush. There was no fear of how the people might react to him. They could tell that he meant what he said and that he said exactly what he meant. With humble, simple clarity, he spoke about the kingdom of God.

With authority (Mark 1:27). That's how Jesus speaks to our hearts as well. Not with the false authority of a bully trying to scare us into submission. Not the insecure authority of a man trying to convince us of something he doesn't believe in himself. No, he speaks with the humble authority of a Messiah motivated by nothing but love for us. It's the authority that a person displays when helping a close friend through a difficult time—talking gently whenever possible, but firmly if necessary, and always with respect and affection. When Jesus speaks to us this way, his words sink into our hearts, and we know he is speaking out of love.

Jesus wants to speak to you with authority at Mass today. He doesn't want to bully you or push you or overpower you. He doesn't want to trick you or deceive you or give you empty promises. No, he wants to stir your heart, kindle your hope, and give you his peace. So come to Mass eager and willing to hear him.

“Holy Spirit, help me hear Jesus’ voice today.”

(Many thanks to *The Word Among Us* for allowing us to use meditations from their monthly devotional magazine. Used with permission. For more information on how to subscribe to their devotional magazine, go to www.wau.org).

Sunday, January 28, 2018

Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion:

1. The first reading from Deuteronomy begins with Moses speaking these words to the people of Israel: “A prophet like me will the LORD, your God, raise up for you from among your own kin; to him you shall listen.” He goes on to warn them with these words that come from the Lord: “Whoever will not listen to my words which he speaks in my name, I myself will make him answer for it.”
 - In what ways was this passage ultimately fulfilled in the coming of Jesus?
 - How seriously do you take the words of Jesus when they require you to do something, or give up something, you don’t want to? Do you sometimes find yourself making excuses for not doing what you know the Lord is calling you to do? If so, what steps can you take to be more faithful to Jesus’ call for your life?
2. The responsorial psalm opens with this encouraging call to give praise and worship to the Lord: “Come, let us sing joyfully to the LORD; let us acclaim the rock of our salvation. Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us joyfully sing psalms to him. Come, let us bow down in worship; let us kneel before the LORD who made us. For he is our God, and we are the people he shepherds, the flock he guides.”
 - Do you believe these words of the psalm apply to us today? If not. Why not?
 - How do these words of the psalm compare to your disposition and actions at Mass, or during your times of personal prayer and worship?
3. The responsorial psalm also continues the message of the first reading by warning us about hardening our hearts. The response to the psalm is “If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.”
 - What are some of the ways that our culture and our fallen natures can harden our hearts?
 - How would you describe the things that can harden your heart towards the Lord?
4. St. Paul tells us in the second reading to be “free of anxieties.” He goes on to say that we need to be “anxious about the things of the Lord,” and how we “may please the Lord.”
 - What are the “things of the Lord” that make you “anxious” to please him?
 - What are the “things of the world” that can get in the way?
5. The Gospel reading opens with these words: “Then they came to Capernaum, and on the sabbath Jesus entered the synagogue and taught. The people were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes.” However, in the reading, we see that Jesus did more than just teach with authority: “In their synagogue was a man with an unclean spirit; he cried out, ‘What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!’ Jesus rebuked him and said, ‘Quiet! Come out of him!’ The unclean spirit convulsed him and with a loud cry came out of him. All were amazed.”
 - Why did Jesus not only teach, but also heal, to demonstrate his true authority as Lord?
 - The reaction to Jesus was that the people were “astonished” and “amazed.” In what ways have you been “astonished” and “amazed” by Jesus’ teachings and his healing touch on your life or others?
 - Do you believe that the authority and the calling that Jesus gave his disciples -- to heal the sick and proclaim the Good News -- have also been given to us as well? Or do you believe that this authority and calling is reserved for just a few, but not for everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord and lives in union with him? If so, why?
6. The meditation is a reflection on the Gospel reading, with special focus on these words, “A new teaching with authority” (Mark 1:27). The meditation ends with these words: “Jesus wants to speak to you with authority at Mass today. He doesn’t want to bully you or push you or overpower you. He doesn’t want to trick you or deceive you or give you empty promises. No, he wants to stir your heart, kindle your hope, and give you his peace. So come to Mass eager and willing to hear him.”
 - What steps can you take prior to Mass so that you “come to Mass eager and willing to hear him”?
 - What can you do at Mass to open yourselves more to the words of Jesus and allow them to “stir your heart, kindle your hope, and give you his peace”?
7. Take some time now to pray and ask the Holy Spirit for a fresh infilling of his Spirit, so that you can hear the Lord’s voice when he speaks to you. Use the prayer below from the end of the meditation as the starting point.

“Holy Spirit, help me hear Jesus’ voice today.”

[The discussion questions were created by Maurice Blumberg, who is currently a member of the board of directors of the **ChristLife Catholic Ministry for Evangelization** (www.christlife.org/) and a member of the **National Service Committee Council of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal** (www.nsc-

As posted on the Catholic Charismatic Renewal National Service Committee’s website: www.nsc-chariscenter.org

chariscenter.org). Maurice was also the founding Executive Director of the **National Fellowship of Catholic Men** and a former chairman of the board of *The Word Among Us* (www.wau.org). He can be contacted at mblumberg@wau.org or mblumberg@aol.com.]