

Sunday, February 1, 2015

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

Overcoming the Temptations of the Evil One

He commands even the unclean spirits and they obey him. (Mark 1:27)

So many people—especially those living in the West—have dismissed the existence of evil spirits. But that’s a big mistake. Evil spirits are real, and they are always at work, trying to destroy our faith and the Church as a whole.

Now, few people are actually possessed by evil spirits, but most of us experience what we may call spiritual harassment from them. Think of how Peter tried to convince Jesus not to go to the cross, only to hear him reply, “Get behind me, Satan!” (Matthew 16:23). Clearly, Peter wasn’t possessed. Still, the devil had gotten into his mind and suggested thoughts that were contrary to God’s plan.

Satan wants to confuse and mislead us, just as he did to Peter. So how do we guard our minds? By trying our best to agree with Jesus. Of course, we should always feel free to ask questions, just as Mary did when she asked the angel, “How can this be?” (Luke 1:34). That’s a lot different from fighting Jesus or going against what he clearly tells us. When we think we know better than Jesus, we are opening ourselves up to the devil’s harassment.

Peter learned how to overcome this harassment, and so can we. The first thing we need to do is acknowledge that it is going on and take action. So when you wake up each morning, ask the Lord to protect you and your loved ones. Call on the name of Jesus, pray to St. Michael the Archangel, or simply mark yourself with the sign of the cross.

Second, keep building your faith. Soak yourself in the Scriptures. Read uplifting spiritual books. Focus on Jesus during Mass. Nothing helps us stay clear-minded more than faith.

Finally, believe that Jesus rules the universe. He wants to help you be alert to the divisive whispers of the devil. Trust that Jesus, who lives in you, is far stronger than “the one who is in the world” (1 John 4:4).

“Lord, help me to stand firm and resist the devil’s temptations today.”

(Many thanks to *The Word Among Us* (www.wau.org) for allowing us to use meditations from their monthly devotional magazine. Used with permission. *The Word Among Us* Mass Edition contains all the Mass readings and prayers, and a meditation for each of the daily and Sunday Masses.)

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Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

1. In the reading from Deuteronomy, God tells the people of Israel that he will raise up a prophet from among them. He goes on to warn them with these words, “Whoever will not listen to my words which he speaks in my name, I myself will make him answer for it.” We know that this passage was 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 are they?
2. The responsorial psalm continues the message of the first reading by warning us not to harden our hearts. There are many ways our culture and our fallen nature can harden our hearts. How would you describe the things that can harden your heart from being a disciple and following the Lord?
3. Although St. Paul tells us in the second reading to be “free of anxieties,” he also tells us to be “anxious about the things of the Lord” and how you “may please the Lord.” What are the "things of the Lord" that make you “anxious” to please him?
4. In the Gospel, Jesus not only taught with authority, but he also healed and delivered the man with an unclean spirit with that same authority. The reaction to Jesus was that the people were "astonished". In what ways have you been “astonished” by Jesus’ healing touch on your life or others?
5. Do you believe that the authority and the calling that Jesus gave his disciples have also been given to us as well — to pray for the sick, proclaim the Good News, and make disciples? 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 describes what can be called “spiritual harassment” and the steps we can take to overcome this harassment. How would you describe spiritual harassment in your own life? In what ways can the steps described in the meditation help you to resist this harassment?
7. Take some time now to pray and ask the Lord for the grace to win the battle against the temptations of the devil? Use the prayer at the end of the meditation as the starting point.

[The discussion questions were created by Maurice Blumberg, a director of 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 is also a member of the National Service Committee Council of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. Maurice was also the founding Executive Director of the **National Fellowship of Catholic Men**, for which he is currently a Trustee (<http://www.nfcmusa.org/>). He can be contacted at mblumberg@wau.org or mblumberg@aol.com.]