

Sunday, March 15, 2015

Fourth Sunday of Lent

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading: 2 Chronicles 36:14-16,19-23

2nd Reading: Ephesians 2:4-10

Responsorial: Psalm 137:1-6

Gospel: John 3:14-21

Serving the Lord in Accordance with His Will for your Life

We are his handiwork, created in Christ Jesus for the good works that God has prepared. (Ephesians 2:10)

Wouldn't it be wonderful to have your own personal tailor who could create a whole wardrobe for you? There would be the right outfit for everything you need or want to do. Each one would look so good that you would feel great wearing it. You could just imagine yourself walking down the street with an air of confidence and self-assurance: you know you look good!

Well, according to St. Paul, God has fashioned not our outer appearance but our inner lives. And the clothing he provides for this tailored interior is a unique set of "good works" that are perfectly suited to the gifts and talents, the insights and personalities he has given us.

So open up your spiritual closet, and try on what's there. You'll probably feel very comfortable stepping into some of those good works that seem to match your preparation and talent. Others, however, may feel like a stretch. You may be tempted to think someone else could perform them better. But as you step into them, you'll discover abilities you never knew you had—just as a woman discovers that an A-line dress really does look good on her!

For example, perhaps you've always hoped the garment of parenthood was in your closet. But when the time comes, you discover that the good work God has designed for you is foster parenting—welcoming unwanted children into your home for a short time until they can find their forever homes. Or maybe you envisioned yourself as a catechist in your parish, but God offers you a different garment: a home-based ministry where you can spend your time caring for an ailing elderly parent.

Be of good cheer! Your Creator and Designer will patiently work with you until there's a perfect fit between you and the garment of service he lays on your shoulders.

“Creator Lord, thank you that I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Give me the courage to grow into your good plan.”

(Many thanks to *The Word Among Us* (www.wau.org) for allowing us to use meditations from their monthly devotional magazine. Used with permission.)

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Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

1. In the first reading, we first hear how the "infidelity," "abominations," and "polluting the Lord's temple," introduced there by God's own people, resulted in the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple. Also, in the first reading, a pagan, gentile king of Persia, Cyrus, is inspired by the Lord to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem even after his people had ignored the warnings from God and despised his word. These Scriptures can serve to remind us that there are areas in our lives that God may be asking us to change in order to live a life more pleasing to him? How would you describe those areas in your life? Do you believe that the Cross of Christ and the Holy Spirit dwelling in you have the power to change and transform you in accordance with God's will for your life? Why or why not?
2. In the Responsorial Psalm, the psalmist speaks for the Israelites exiled in Babylon: "If I forget you, Jerusalem, may my right hand be forgotten! May my tongue cleave to my palate if I remember you not, if I place not Jerusalem ahead of my joy." Why do you think the city of Jerusalem, and the temple within it, were so important to God's people? As you reflect on these Scriptures, how strong is your conviction that God will be faithful to the promises he has made to his Church, the Body of Christ, in spite of any scandals and sins, and the persecutions and attacks against it? What steps can you take to pray and intercede more often for the Church and its leaders?
3. The second reading opens with these words: "Brothers and sisters: God, who is rich in mercy, because of the great love he had for us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, brought us to life with Christ — by grace you have been saved." What do these words tell you about the attributes of God and his "great love" for you?
4. Also in the second reading, St. Paul states that God "raised us up with him, and seated us with him in the heavens in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus." In what way is your life an example to others of God's "immeasurable riches of his grace in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus"? In what ways are your Lenten observances helping to make your life an even greater witness of Christ to others?
5. John 3:16 which is part of the Gospel reading (and frequently appears at sporting events) beautifully and succinctly encapsulates the entire Bible: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life." During Lent, how can you deepen your gratefulness for the price God chose to pay to forgive you of your sins and bring you to eternal life?
6. The meditation is a reflection on these final words from the second reading: "For we are his handiwork, created in Christ Jesus for the good works that God has prepared in advance, that we should live in them" (Ephesians 2:10). The meditation reminds us that God has "a unique set of 'good works' that are perfectly suited to the gifts and talents, the insights and personalities he has given us." It also reminds us to "Be of good cheer! Your Creator and Designer will patiently work with you until there's a perfect fit between you and the garment of service he lays on your shoulders." How have you experienced the truth of these words in your life? In what ways may his plan for your life be calling you to even more service for him?
7. Take some time now to pray and ask the Lord for the grace and courage to say yes to his plan for your life and "the good works that God has prepared in advance." 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.]

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