

Sunday, May 3, 2015

Fifth Sunday of Easter

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading: Acts 9:26-31

2nd Reading: 1 John 3:18-24

Responsorial: Psalm 22:26-28, 30-32

Gospel: John 15:1-8

Allowing Ourselves to be Pruned by God, *To Bear Fruit for his Kingdom*

Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit. (John 15:5)

A good gardener can seem like a surgeon sometimes: meticulously careful in his goal of removing anything that is a threat to his plantings. He is completely dedicated to making his roses even more beautiful or his grapes more delicious.

Imagine the kind of pruning Jesus, the master Gardener, had to do with Paul. In the days immediately following his conversion, Paul proved needed a lot of work! On fire with his new-found faith, he debated so forcefully with the Jews in Damascus that they tried to kill him. Even the disciples were afraid of him (Acts 9:26-29)! The situation became so drastic that the apostles decided to send Paul back home to Tarsus for a while. They could tell that some time away from all the action would do him good.

This story shows us two ways that God likes to prune us. First, there is quiet time spent with the Lord. Paul spent a number of years in Tarsus praying, studying the Scriptures, and examining his heart. During this time of retreat, he gave the Holy Spirit the opportunity to soften his rough edges, reveal the gospel to him more clearly, and prepare him for his future ministry. The same holds true for us. By sitting quietly before the Lord in prayer, we give the Spirit the opportunity to prune us and form us.

Another way God prunes us is through the steps we take in our walk with him, whether we are sharing our faith or trying to serve our family. As Saul preached, he came to see how argumentative he was. He learned from his mistakes, and over time he learned the art of being both passionate and compassionate in his preaching.

So keep stepping out in faith, but be sure also to keep listening to the Lord in the quiet of your prayer. Let him prune you, and you'll find yourself bearing more and more fruit for his kingdom!

"Come, Holy Spirit, and make me more like Jesus!"

(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 find Saul speaking “boldly in the name of the Lord.” In what ways do you believe that you also have been called to boldly tell others of Christ, e.g., at work, in your neighborhood, or in everyday encounters with other people? What do you believe is the source of this boldness?
2. With the following words, the Responsorial Psalm also reinforces the call we have as Catholics to share our faith with others: “Let the coming generation be told of the Lord that they may proclaim to a people yet to be born the justice of the Lord.” In what ways have you been willing to tell members of your family how Jesus satisfied the justice of God by dying on the cross for our sins? What are the obstacles that you may need to overcome in order to do this with a confidence that the Lord will use you to touch the “coming generation”?
3. The second reading encourages us to love “not in word or speech but in deed and truth” and to “love one another just as he commanded us.” How well do you regard other members of your parish as your brothers and sisters in Christ? In what ways do you show it “in deed and truth”? What additional steps can you take to reach out even more to others in your parish or your community?
4. In the Gospel, Jesus says to his disciples (and us): “I am the vine, you are the branches,” and he says that that he will “prune” the branch (that is, you and I) so that “it bears more fruit.” Jesus also tells us that “Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing.” What do these words mean to you?
5. The meditation ends with these encouraging words: “So keep stepping out in faith, but be sure also to keep listening to the Lord in the quiet of your prayer. Let him prune you, and you’ll find yourself bearing more and more fruit for his kingdom!” In what ways have the pleasant and difficult circumstances of your life allowed your heavenly Father to prune you and mold you, so that you become more and more like his beloved Son? How has this pruning by the Lord allowed your faith, and the fruit that it bears, to grow? What additional steps can you take to increase your openness to his pruning?
6. Take some time now to pray and ask the Father, through his Holy Spirit, to prune you and make you more like Jesus -- so that you can “bear much fruit.” 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.]