

Sunday, August 2, 2015

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading Exodus 16:2-4, 12-15

2nd Reading: Ephesians 4:17, 20-24

Responsorial: Psalm 78:3-4, 23-25, 54

Gospel: John 6:24-35

Hold Fast to Jesus, *No Matter the Circumstances*

What can we do? (John 6:28)

You've probably heard of the Rubik's Cube, a puzzle requiring tremendous concentration to solve. You must move the parts of the cube in an exact sequence to master it. Many start out enthusiastically, only to give up after a few minutes, frustrated by the puzzle's complexities.

You could say the crowd in today's Gospel is treating Jesus like a kind of puzzle. They can't seem to figure him out. He was a prophet, no doubt. But he said and did things that stretched their laws and traditions in uncomfortable ways. What did he mean about being the "bread of life" (John 6:35)? How could he do things that only God could do, like heal the sick or forgive sins? They couldn't get their minds around him because they hadn't yet started thinking "outside of the cube."

Still, you have to admire their tenacity. Even when Jesus gives them an answer that they don't understand, they try a different tack. "When did you get here?" "What can we do to accomplish the works of God?" "What sign can you do?" They really want to know, and they're not about to give up! And as we will see at the end of this chapter, no one was more tenacious than Peter. After having heard Jesus give so many baffling—and seemingly scandalous—answers, he decides to keep following him. "Master," he asks, "to whom shall we go?" (John 6:68). There's no one else who speaks with the same authority, passion, and love. All I can do now is stay with you until it all makes sense.

How tenacious are you? Sometimes we want to know exactly what God is doing in our lives—Should I stay at this job? Should I marry the person I'm dating? Why wasn't my loved one healed when I prayed? Sometimes there isn't a yes or no answer, and other times we just have to wait. Whatever happens, stick with it. Stick with Jesus, and you will be rewarded!

"Lord, I believe that you are my 'bread of life.' Help me hold fast to you" (John 6:35).

(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, the Israelites “grumbled against Moses” even though they had seen God work miracles through him to set them free from a brutal slavery in Egypt. Why do you believe the miracles were not sufficient to put their faith in God when they experienced difficult times in the desert? Why do you believe God would respond in such love rather than punish the Israelites for their lack of faith and trust in him? How would you describe the message this reading is intended to convey to us?
2. The Responsorial Psalm calls the bread the Lord gave the Israelites “bread from heaven.” In what ways is this bread that the Lord “rained” down from heaven (Exodus 16:4) a foreshadowing of the Eucharist? In what way is it different?
3. In the second reading, St. Paul exhorts his fellow believers to no longer live in the “futility of their minds,” but to “be renewed in the spirit of your minds.” This reading is also similar to Romans 12:2: “Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect.” In both readings, St. Paul is calling for a “renewal” of our minds. Specifically, he is calling us to live a life ruled by the Holy Spirit, not by the world or our “flesh,” which is “corrupted through deceitful desires.” In what way do you see this as a call for your own life? What steps can you take to respond to this call to “be renewed in the spirit of your mind”?
4. In the Gospel reading from John, even though the crowd had seen Jesus multiply the loaves, they still ask him to perform a sign similar to the Israelites receiving manna in the desert. The crowd referred to this manna as “bread from heaven to eat” (John 6:31), yet were not able to see Jesus as the “true bread from heaven” (6:32). In what ways were the responses of the “crowd” that followed Jesus to Capernaum similar to those of the Israelites in the desert? In what ways were they responding as men and women of the flesh, not of the Spirit?
5. The Gospel reading ends with these words of Jesus: “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst” (6:35)? Though it is not included in this Sunday’s reading, what do you think the crowd’s reactions were to these words of Jesus? What is your reaction to these words?
6. The meditation ends with these words: “How tenacious are you? Sometimes we want to know exactly what God is doing in our lives—Should I stay at this job? Should I marry the person I’m dating? Why wasn’t my loved one healed when I prayed? Sometimes there isn’t a yes or no answer, and other times we just have to wait. Whatever happens, stick with it. Stick with Jesus, and you will be rewarded!” These are challenging words. How tenacious are you in holding onto to your faith and trust in Jesus, no matter how long you have been waiting for an answer to prayer, or no matter what your circumstances may be?
7. Take some time now to pray for grace to “hold fast” to Jesus in all circumstances. 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.]