

Sunday, August 23, 2015

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading Joshua 24:1-2, 15-18

2nd Reading: Ephesians 5:21-32

Responsorial: Psalm 34:2-3, 16-21

Gospel: John 6:60-69

Being Faithful to the Lord in Difficult Circumstances

To whom shall we go? (John 6:68)

Joshua, the Old Testament leader called to bring God's people into the Promised Land, has much in common with Peter, the fisherman Jesus chose to lead his Church. Both men knew what it meant to follow God when the going got rough!

As Moses' servant, Joshua heard the people murmur and grumble against God during their desert wanderings. As Jesus' disciple, Peter heard other disciples complain that Jesus' "bread of life" statements were too difficult to accept (John 6:60). Yet both men realized that God was at work in the powerful things they had witnessed: Joshua saw the Israelites' deliverance from slavery in Egypt; Peter, the healings and miracles worked by Jesus. Each leader expressed his conviction in a ringing declaration of faith (Joshua 24:15; John 6:68-69).

"Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:68). Never before had Peter met anyone who spoke words that gave life. Through Jesus, he had come to experience God's love and mercy. He also came to realize that Jesus spoke with God's authority and power. He saw him move people from unbelief to faith through his miracles and his preaching. As a conscientious witness to these wonders, Peter could only declare, "We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God" (6:69).

Just as he did for Joshua and Peter, God wants to show himself to you. He wants to convince you that he has a perfect plan for your life. What's really exciting about this prospect is that when God pours his grace on you and reveals his love to you, it changes you. Of course, it fills you with joy and faith. But it also gives you all the courage and strength you need to do what Peter and Joshua did—to stay close to the Lord when the going gets rough!

"Lord, you are the Holy One who loves, hears, and rescues me. I believe your words. I will follow you wherever you lead me—right up to the gates of heaven!"

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Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

1. In the first reading today, Joshua challenges the Israelites - who had witnessed God's saving hand as he freed them from Egypt, fed them in the desert for forty years, and gave them the promised land - to make a decision to serve the Lord or choose someone else whom they would follow. Joshua's challenge ends with these words: "As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord." The Israelite's response was, "Therefore, we will also serve the Lord, for he is our God." Today, the Lord is putting that same challenge to each of us. What is your response? What are some steps you can take to serve the Lord more faithfully?
2. The Responsorial Psalm begins with these words: "I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall ever be in my mouth." Although this sounds like an impossibility based on the busyness of our days, yet it is a reminder of our need to turn to the Lord more often. Are there some steps you can take to make the words of the psalmist a greater reality in your life, even in the midst of your busyness? What impact do you think it will have on your day?
3. In the Responsorial Psalm, we are also promised God's constant closeness and protection, especially during times of great distress. In fact we are told our souls will "glory" in the Lord and be "glad". St. Augustine said a Christian should be an "alleluia from head to toe." How would you describe the ways your "gladness" in the Lord is a Christian witness to others? Is their room for improvement? In what ways?
4. In the second reading, St. Paul quotes the passage from Genesis 2:24 that is used in marriage ceremonies: "For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh" (Ephesians 5:31). He goes on to say these words: "This is a great mystery, but I speak in reference to Christ and the church" (5:32). This, of course, is the highest possible standard of love for husbands and wives, as well as for all Christian relationships. 1 John 3:16 describes it this way: "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters." If you are married, how do these Scriptures apply to you? Whether you are married or single, what changes can you make to better reflect Christ's love to others?
5. In the Gospel, we meet those followers of Jesus who found his teachings on the Eucharist too difficult, and so left him to return to their former way of life. St. Peter speaks for all of us when he says: "Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life?" What are the situations or circumstances that can sometimes cause you to vacillate between returning to your former way of life versus following Jesus wholeheartedly? During those times are you able to remind yourself that Jesus has "the words of eternal life" and that you believe and are convinced that he is "the Holy one of God"?
6. The meditation ends with these words: "Just as he did for Joshua and Peter, God wants to show himself to you. He wants to convince you that he has a perfect plan for your life. What's really exciting about this prospect is that when God pours his grace on you and reveals his love to you, it changes you. Of course, it fills you with joy and faith. But it also gives you all the courage and strength you need to do what Peter and Joshua did—to stay close to the Lord when the going gets rough!" What are the obstacles that can make it hard for you to believe he has a "perfect plan for your life"? What role can deepening the way you receive the Eucharist help you in overcoming these obstacles, even when "the going gets rough"?
7. Take some time now to pray and thank the Lord for his great love for you. Ask him for the grace to wholeheartedly follow him, and believe and trust in his plan for your life. 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.]