

Sunday, August 30, 2015

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading Deuteronomy 4:1-2,6-8

2nd Reading: James 1:17-18,21-22,27

Responsorial: Psalm 15:2-5

Gospel: Mark 7:1-8,14-15,21-23

The Importance of Being Hearers and Doers of the Word of God

Be doers of the word and not hearers only. (James 1:22)

In the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, Lutherans and Catholics spelled out their common understanding of and belief in the concept of justification by faith. Issued in 1999, the declaration said, “Together we confess: By grace alone, in faith in Christ’s saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to good works” (15).

Faith in Jesus is the way to salvation. We cannot save ourselves. At the same time, faith calls us to do good works. C. S. Lewis once said that any discussion about which is more important—faith or works—is as senseless as asking which blade of a pair of scissors is more important. Both are important. Both are critical. Both are necessary.

If faith were not vital, we would have to ask, “Then why did Jesus die for our sins?” If works were not crucial, we would have to ask, “Why did Jesus tell us to go out and evangelize, care for the poor, visit the sick, and feed the hungry?”

Faith and works are inseparable. When people asked Jesus, “What can we do to accomplish the works of God?” he answered, “This is the work of God, that you believe in the one he sent” (John 6:28, 29). Even faith in Jesus takes work. It means entrusting ourselves to his saving grace. It means choosing to surrender ourselves to him and obeying his word.

So make it a point to put your faith in Jesus every day. At the same time, make it a point to serve the Lord and to care for his people. Be a believer and be a doer. You have incredible gifts. They were given to you so that you would build the kingdom of heaven on earth. Use your talents for God, and you’ll see people’s faith come to life.

“Jesus, you are my Savior. I believe in you, Lord!”

(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 today's first reading, Moses declares that the Israelites' obedience to the commandments of God would be a great witness to other nations and would bring glory to God. Why do you believe this is so? In what way is our obedience to Christ and his commandments in our daily lives a witness to others that he is truly the Lord? How are you doing?
2. Moses also warns the Israelites to keep God's law, not adding or subtracting from it. Why is this also true of us when it comes to Christ's and the Church's teachings? Why is being faithful to these teachings not just a matter of trying harder to do better, but requires a greater reliance on the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit? Knowing this, what steps can you take to help you be more faithful to these teachings?
3. In the Responsorial Psalm, we are invited to see that God demands that in our daily actions, and our dealings with others, we need to walk "blamelessly," do "justice," think "the truth" and not "slander." We also hear these words of encouragement, "Whoever does these things will not be disturbed" (Psalm 15:5). Why is our interior peace so dependent on living a godly life?
4. In the second reading, James tells us that we need to keep ourselves from sin and "to care" for others. In what way does this require us to continue to grow spiritually and to open ourselves more deeply to God's transforming love? Are there some additional steps you can take to do this, so that so that you will "be doers of the word and not hearers only"?
5. The second reading ends with these words: "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unstained by the world." What steps can you take to reach out more to others, especially "orphans," "widows," and others less fortunate than you?
6. In the Gospel, Jesus presents examples where the Pharisees and scribes have added to God's law their own commandments (e.g., certain ritual purifications). They are warned against religious observance that is purely external and ritualistic. How does Jesus distinguish between rituals that are empty and those that are from God and are life-giving?
7. Jesus also told the Pharisees and scribes that they "honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me." What can we do in our celebration of the Eucharist, and the other Sacraments, that will allow us to experience greater renewal in our inner selves, so that we are able to manifest the love, power, and compassion of Christ to others?
8. The meditation challenges us with these words: "Faith in Jesus is the way to salvation. We cannot save ourselves. At the same time, faith calls us to do good works." Why is faith in Jesus the "way to salvation"? The meditation goes on to say that "Faith and works are inseparable." Why are our "good works" the "evidence" of our salvation? If someone were to ask you why faith and works are inseparable, how would you answer him?
9. Take some time now to pray and thank the Lord for setting you free from sin and death, and for the grace to be a better "hearer" and "doer" of the Word of God. 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.]