

Sunday, September 13, 2015

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading Isaiah 50:5-9
Responsorial: Psalm 116:1-6, 8-9

2nd Reading: James 2:14-18
Gospel: Mark 8:27-35

What it Means to Deny Ourselves, Take up Our Cross, and Follow Jesus

“Peter ... began to rebuke him. (Mark 8:32)

Peter has a striking insight and dares to express it to Jesus. “You are the Messiah!” he affirms. In Matthew’s account, Jesus calls Simon “blessed” for being open to divine revelation (Matthew 16:13-19, 17). However, Jesus doesn’t let Peter bask in this moment. Right away, he begins to describe what being God’s Anointed means: suffering and death for Jesus, and for his followers as well.

Peter’s reaction is swift and understandable: horror. Jesus in turn rebukes him for thinking like a human being rather than thinking like God. Peter has begun to see things from God’s perspective, and that should change everything.

Next, Jesus calls Peter to leadership. But Peter has to understand that leading doesn’t mean lording it over others but laying down his life for them (Mark 10:42-45). He can’t be a leader like this based on his own strength and wisdom. He must lay these things at Christ’s feet and receive God’s gifts of a new heart, a new mind, and a new way of life.

One way of taking up our cross is to put aside our natural but fallen ways of thinking and ask God to help us see things as he does. The obvious example here is that suffering and death aren’t the ultimate evil; far worse are sin and failure to do God’s will.

What other ways of thinking might you need to adjust? Perhaps the judgment that this (career or security) is very important or that (taking care of home and children or keeping church laws) is not so important. Perhaps the commonsense but inadequate approach is that I can’t love others unless I first love myself; that my needs, then the needs of my family, come before the claims of the poor; or that material needs are more fundamental than spiritual ones.

Spend a few moments today asking God to show you one way in which you need to change your mind so that you can make room for his way of thinking.

“Father, open up to me the riches of your wisdom. I want to see everything and everyone as you see them.”

(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. The first reading from Isaiah offers a prophetic foreshadowing of the passion of Jesus Christ. How would you describe the ways that Jesus has fulfilled this prophecy?
2. The first reading also provides insights into the mind of a man of faith, who in the midst of his suffering is still able to proclaim: “The Lord God is my help, therefore, I am not disgraced,” “I shall not be put to shame,” and “He is near who upholds my right.” When you experience difficulties and suffering, what role does your faith in Jesus Christ play in how you respond? What steps can you take to allow your faith to have a greater impact on your response?
3. The Responsorial Psalm speaks of how gracious and merciful and caring the Lord is in the midst of great “distress and sorrow.” In what ways are the words of this Psalm, like the first reading, those of hope and trust in the Lord? What were some times in your own life when the Lord “heard my voice in supplication” and “inclined his ear to me the day I called”?
4. In the second reading, James tells us that “faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead.” He goes on to say, “Demonstrate your faith to me without works, and I will demonstrate my faith from my works.” Why are works a demonstration of our faith? If you were put on trial to prove you are a Christian from your works, would there be enough evidence for a conviction?
5. The Catechism (no. 161) states that “Believing in Jesus Christ and in the one who sent him for our salvation is necessary for obtaining that salvation . . . therefore without faith no one has ever attained justification, nor will anyone obtain eternal life ‘but he who endures to the end.’” How would you relate these words on the importance of faith to James’ words on the importance of works?
6. In the Gospel, Jesus speaks these words to his disciples and the crowd (and to us): “Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the gospel will save it” (Mark 8:35). What do you think these words mean and how do they apply to you?
7. The meditation provides additional insights on Mark 8:35 with these words: “One way of taking up our cross is to put aside our natural but fallen ways of thinking and ask God to help us see things as he does. The obvious example here is that suffering and death aren’t the ultimate evil; far worse are sin and failure to do God’s will.” The meditation also asks us to consider this: “What other ways of thinking might you need to adjust?” and then ends with these words: “Spend a few moments today asking God to show you one way in which you need to change your mind so that you can make room for his way of thinking.” How would you describe the “ways of thinking” that God may want you to adjust “so that you can make room for his way of thinking”?
8. Take some time now to pray to God the Father for eyes to see things as he sees them, for ears to hear his voice leading you, and for the grace to act on his call 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.]