

Sunday, September 20, 2015

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading Wisdom 2:12, 17-20

Responsorial: Psalm 54:3-6, 8

2nd Reading: James 3:16–4:3

Gospel: Mark 9:30-37

Saying Yes to Jesus and No to Sin

“Where do the conflicts among you come from? (James 4:1)

Our minds have the capacity to do amazing things. They can imagine, memorize, reason, and choose. We use them to solve complex problems, to imagine new possibilities, and to enjoy the beauty of a sunrise. What an awesome gift!

But Scripture tells us that, because of sin, our minds also have a dark side. And sometimes, that dark side causes us to say and do hurtful things. Today’s first reading, for instance, talks about a war in our minds between darker elements like jealousy or selfish ambition and lighter elements like purity and mercy.

Today’s Gospel has a similar theme. It tells how the apostles were fighting about which one of them was the greatest. You can just hear Peter, saying, “Jesus told me I was the rock,” while John replies, “But Jesus called me the beloved apostle,” and Andrew says, “Don’t forget, I was the first apostle. I’ve been with him the longest.” It can sound a bit silly, but we, too, do this kind of thing, and this is the kind of thing James is talking about.

The problem, James tells us, is that we have a tendency to let our minds roam wherever they want to go. If we don’t keep a watch on them, they can wander into the darker areas of our hearts and begin conjuring all kinds of self-centered thoughts.

So here is a little plan to help you keep watch on your mind. Step One is to fill it with thoughts about the Lord every morning and at regular points throughout the day. Step Two is ... well, there is no Step Two. Jesus is all we need!

Filling your mind with Jesus—through the sacraments, prayer, hymns, or Scripture—will dramatically affect the way you think and act. So be disciplined. Spend at least fifteen minutes exclusively with the Lord every morning. Then stop periodically during the day to turn back to the Lord. You will see those dark side drives to sin melt away.

“Jesus, help me say no to every temptation to sin.”

(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, in many ways, is a prophetic foreshadowing of Jesus' rejection by his own people, and ultimately his passion and death. The reading speaks of the human tendency to attack and to reject those who "set themselves against our doings." It also speaks of Jesus' patience and gentleness, which we are called to emulate. What is your reaction when you have been accused unjustly or treated unfairly? What about when you are stopped for speeding or your work is criticized? How well does it emulate Jesus?
2. In the responsorial psalm, the psalmist, in response to the attacks of his enemies, cries out to God in prayer with these words: "O God, by your name save me. By your strength defend my cause. O God, hear my prayer. Listen to the words of my mouth." Why is it important to turn to God in prayer as the first reaction to difficult situations?
3. The psalmist ends his petitions with these words of faith and trust, "Behold, God is my helper; the Lord sustains my life. Freely will I offer sacrifice; I will praise your name, O Lord, for its goodness." Why is this an appropriate way to end a time of prayer and supplication to the Lord? Do you end your own times of prayer with thanksgiving and praise to the Lord? Should you?
4. In the second reading, St. James contrasts the disorder, which is often part of our human lives, with the "wisdom from above," which is pure, peaceable, gentle, compliant, and full of mercy and good fruits. Why is there such a difference between the "wisdom" that comes from God and the jealousy, selfish ambition, wars, and conflicts that come from our fallen nature? What examples are there from your own life when you have seen victory over jealousy, envy, and selfish ambition by turning to "Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 1:24)?
5. In the Gospel, Jesus takes his disciples off privately for an important and personal message. He tells them he is to be killed, but he will rise from the dead. Amazingly, rather than trying to understand what Jesus has told them, they are more concerned about which one of them is the greatest. Why does self-absorption tend to make us less attentive to what Christ may be telling us? What steps can you take to be more attentive to Jesus' words?
6. Jesus also turns the "natural order" on its head in the Gospel with these words: "If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be the last of all and the servant of all." What do these words mean to you? What are some ways that you can be a better servant to your family or to others in your parish?
7. The meditation ends with these words: "Filling your mind with Jesus—through the sacraments, prayer, hymns, or Scripture—will dramatically affect the way you think and act. So be disciplined. Spend at least fifteen minutes exclusively with the Lord every morning. Then stop periodically during the day to turn back to the Lord. You will see those dark side drives to sin melt away." What steps can you take to open yourself to Jesus' presence each day in prayer, and during the day -- to allow him to transform you more and more into his likeness?
8. Take some time now to pray and ask the Lord for the grace to say no to sin, and to temptations to sin. 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.]