

Sunday, September 27, 2015

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading Numbers 11:25-2

2nd Reading: James 5:1-6

Responsorial: Psalm 19:8, 10, 12-14

Gospel: Mark 9:38-43, 45, 47-48

Answering God's Call to Reach Out to Those in Need

Whoever is not against us is for us. (Mark 9:40)

In the first reading, we see how Eldad and Medad created a mess. According to tradition, prophets had to go to the tabernacle outside of the camp in order to receive their prophetic words. But here were Eldad and Medad prophesying in God's name within the encampment. Joshua told Moses to stop them. But Moses replied, "Would that all the people of the Lord were prophets!" (Numbers 11:29)

Moving forward some twelve hundred years, we find John telling Jesus that a man was casting out demons in his name. John wanted to stop him, but Jesus seemed to have no problem. Let him go, even if it gets a bit messy, for "whoever is not against us is for us" (Mark 9:40)

Why couldn't Joshua look at the prophetic words uttered by Eldad and Medad rather than focusing on the protocol? Why couldn't John, who admitted that this stranger was successful in casting out demons, rejoice in his success and believe that this man had been given a gift from God?

Now, move forward to today. We have all heard Pope Francis calling us to create a "mess" in the Church. He has urged us to go out and reach individuals in their needs. "We cannot keep ourselves shut up in parishes, in our communities," he said, "when so many people are waiting for the Gospel." We like to have things neat and tidy in our parishes, but the Holy Father is asking us to embrace the messiness that comes when we place mercy, kindness, and love ahead of propriety and tradition.

Of course Pope Francis honors tradition. Of course he loves truth. But he weeps over the condition of all of God's children. That's why he asks us to create the kind of mess that Jesus created when he welcomed a Roman centurion (Matthew 8:5-13), a much-divorced woman (John 4:4-42), a prostitute (Luke 7:36-50), and a tax collector (19:1-10). So go out there, and get your hands dirty!

"Here I am, Lord! Send me!"

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Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

1. In the first reading, Moses responds to Joshua's concern by saying: "Would that the Lord might bestow his spirit on them all!" As baptized Catholics, the Holy Spirit dwells in each one of us. In what ways have you experienced the power of the Holy Spirit? What steps can you take to allow a deeper work of the Holy Spirit in your life?
2. The Responsorial Psalm reminds us that rather than being burdensome: "The precepts of the Lord give joy to the heart," as well as "refreshing the soul," "giving wisdom to the simple," and "enduring forever." In what ways is this contrary to the current thinking in our culture? Where in your life have you been surprised when, by following God's precepts instead of your own desires, you experienced joy, refreshment, and wisdom?
3. St. James, in the second reading, expresses his concern for justice and condemns the greedy behavior of those who would cheat, demean, or dehumanize others for their own benefit. This theme is also of great concern to Pope Francis. What are some ways we as Catholics could do more to reach out to those who suffer injustice and are alienated? How can we do more to promote a "culture of life" in our country?
4. In the first part of the Gospel, Jesus admonishes his disciples (and us) to be tolerant of all who serve him and believe in his name: "There is no one who performs a mighty deed in my name who can at the same time speak ill of me. For whoever is not against us is for us. Anyone who gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ, amen, I say to you, will surely not lose his reward." Could these words of Jesus be applied to how we view and treat Christians who are not Catholic? If so, what are some steps we can take as Catholics to foster unity with other Christians?
5. In the second part of the Gospel, Jesus strongly warns us of the consequences of behavior (words, actions, omissions) that might cause others to sin. Why do you think this applies especially to our behavior as Christians? What are some steps you can take to improve the kind of example and model you are as a Christian to your family, neighbors, friends, or co-workers?
6. The meditation reminds us that Pope Francis "has urged us to go out and reach individuals in their needs." It goes on to quote these words of his: "We cannot keep ourselves shut up in parishes, in our communities, when so many people are waiting for the Gospel." In light of these words, do you believe that God desires to speak his word to others through you? If not, why not? If so, in what ways?
7. Take some time now to pray and ask the Lord for the grace to say yes, in a deeper way, to his call to be his witness, voice, hands, and feet to our broken and fallen world. 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.]