

Sunday, September 6, 2015

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading Isaiah 35:4-7

2nd Reading: James 2:1-5

Responsorial: Psalm 146:7-10

Gospel: Mark 7:31-37

Overcoming Fear to Live a Life of Faith, Freedom, Courage, and Generosity

Say to those whose hearts are frightened: Be strong, fear not! (Isaiah 35:4)

Today's readings sketch some scenes from the life that God wants for all of us: a life of freedom, strength, and generosity. At the same time, they show how fear can be a hindrance to entering fully into that life. In the second reading, for instance, James exhorts us to welcome the needy and the outcast. But do you ever find that fear is keeping you from embracing the unfamiliar? Or maybe you feel nervous asking for miracles as boldly as Jesus does in the Gospel reading.

There are hundreds of occasions in the Bible when God tells someone "Fear not," and for good reason. Just the thought of encountering God in all his glory can be unsettling! But there's a twist in today's first reading. God doesn't just tell the Israelites not to be afraid. He wants them to say the same thing to the people around them. That's because he knows how helping someone else to overcome fear is one of the best ways to conquer it in your own life.

Do you find that anxiety is a recurring theme when you talk with your friends, neighbors, or workmates? Whether it's stories in the news or concerns over relationships or finances, much of our daily conversation can be spent expressing fear. Turn those conversations upside down by sharing an encouraging story. It could be how you saw God work in your life or the life of a loved one. It could be a new insight from Scripture. It could even be one of the stories you've read in this magazine! God hasn't just commanded us not to be afraid. He has given us thousands of good reasons to live fearlessly. Then watch as your own heart swells with encouragement—and the people around you brighten up as well.

Make a list today of some of the stories you could have "up your sleeve" that will help encourage the fainthearted—including yourself.

"Lord, you are always at work to overcome fear in my life. Help me to live courageously, always ready to encourage the people around me."

(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 begins with these powerful words from the Lord: “Say to those whose hearts are frightened: Be strong, fear not! Here is your God, he comes with vindication; with divine recompense he comes to save you.” In what ways have you received encouragement from God in a time of trial as you prayed or read Scripture.
2. The Responsorial Psalm speaks of God’s great love and care for the needy, in particular, those who are oppressed, hungry, captive, blind, bowed down, fatherless, and widows. In what ways has Jesus Christ fulfilled this Psalm (and the first reading as well)? Of course, as Christians, we are called to reflect God’s love to others. What are some things you can do to better reflect God’s love and care for the needy?
3. In the second reading, we are told to “show no partiality,” especially between the rich and the poor. Why do you think this is important to God? Why should it be important to us as Christians? How well are you doing at showing “no partiality”?
4. In the Gospel, Jesus heals a deaf man with a speech impediment. In what ways are the healings of Jesus a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah and signs of his divine nature? (Hint: see the first reading from Isaiah.) Do you believe that our prayers can be instruments of healing, and a reflection of Jesus’ compassion, in the lives of the sick? Have you ever experienced a time when your prayers for healing were answered? What keeps you from praying more often for others for healing?
5. The meditation begins by reminding us of “the life that God wants for all of us: a life of freedom, strength, and generosity.” It goes on to challenge us with these words regarding overcoming fear: “God hasn’t just commanded us not to be afraid. He has given us thousands of good reasons to live fearlessly.” How would you describe some of these reasons, including some from your own life?
6. Take some time now to pray and ask Jesus for the grace to overcome any fears in your life and the grace to live a life of faith, freedom, courage, and generosity. 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.]