

Sunday, February 14, 2016

First Sunday of Lent

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading Deuteronomy 26:4-10

2nd Reading: Romans 10:8-13

Responsorial: Psalm 91:1-2, 10-15

Gospel: Luke 4:1-13

Loving Others as Jesus Has Loved Us

Because he clings to me, I will deliver him. (Psalm 91:14)

Do you remember falling in love? The whole world seemed new, and you felt as if you were walking on air—all because someone had stolen your heart.

As exhilarating as that feeling is, it's just the beginning of a love story. As your relationship progresses, you learn that love isn't just a warm feeling. It also involves responsibility and hard work. In every relationship, situations come up in which you have to choose to protect and develop your love—and that often means a degree of self-sacrifice. It may mean turning down a promotion because it would take away more time with your family than would be healthy. It may mean caring for an aging parent or spouse who has become dependent on you for everything. It's in times like these that you are called to embrace a fuller meaning of love: selflessness.

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus enters the desert, where he is tempted by Satan. While each temptation is different, they all have the same goal of luring Jesus away from his commitment to love us "to the end" (John 13:1). Jesus chooses love.

This is a fitting topic for the feast day of St. Valentine. In the third century, the emperor Claudius II banned all marriages in Rome so that he could have more unattached men for his army. Valentine, a bishop, defied the emperor's order and married couples in secret. He was ultimately arrested, beaten, and beheaded. Valentine could have chosen self-preservation, but he sacrificed his life for love instead.

Today, consider the way that Jesus and many heroes of the faith have chosen love over personal gain or preservation. Think about the way their decisions have caused a ripple effect on the world. Then ask the Lord to show you how you can take the next step toward choosing love.

"Lord, help me remember to make my relationships a priority. Teach me how to love as you did, Jesus—fully and from the heart."

(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 Discussion

1. In the first reading, Moses reminds the people of all that God has done for them by setting them free from slavery to the Egyptians and giving them the “land flowing with milk and honey.” He also instructs the people (and the priests) to personally express their gratefulness and thanks to God, and then offering him their “first fruits.” Each of us has been set free from slavery to sin, through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. What are some “first fruits” you can offer to God out of gratefulness to Him for this wonderful work.
2. The Responsorial Psalm calls the Lord our “refuge and fortress, my God in whom I trust,” that is, the source of our comfort and strength. Where do you turn for comfort and strength? How can you overcome the obstacles that keep you from seeking your comfort and strength from the Lord?
3. The Responsorial Psalm also describes the many promises of the Lord. How would you describe these promises, and how do they apply to what the Lord has done in your life?
4. In the second reading, St. Paul tells us that “if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” In what ways do you agree or disagree with this?
5. The second reading also says that in Christ all distinctions between people have been abolished, whether Jew or Greek (or any other ethnic group). Considering that one day all the “saved” will be together in heaven as one body in complete unity, what are the prejudices in your life God might be asking you to eliminate?
6. In the Gospel reading, how would you summarize the temptations of the devil towards Jesus in the desert? How would you relate them to the ways the devil tries to tempt you?
7. In the Gospel, we also see the power of the Word of God to fight temptations, as Jesus quotes the truths of Scripture to respond to the lies and temptations of the devil. How often do you read Scripture on your own now? How often do you use Scriptures (the Sword of the Spirit) as a weapon against the devil’s temptations? What are some steps you can take during Lent that will allow you to spend more time reading and meditating on Scripture – and more regularly?
8. The meditation describes how St. Valentine, in marrying couples in secret, was willing to risk his life by defying the Roman emperor’s order to ban all marriages. This eventually led to his arrest and horrific death. What is your reaction to St. Valentine’s actions? Was there ever a time when you had to refuse to do something, with resultant consequences, because it was wrong and went against God’s will for you? What was the outcome?
9. The meditation ends with these words, “Today, consider the way that Jesus and many heroes of the faith have chosen love over personal gain or preservation. Think about the way their decisions have caused a ripple effect on the world. Then ask the Lord to show you how you can take the next step toward choosing love.” It is said that you can’t give away what you haven’t received. During this grace-filled season of Lent, what steps can you take to open yourself more to receiving Jesus’ love so you can share it with others?
10. Take some time now to pray and ask for the grace to love others as Jesus has loved you (John 13:34-35). 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.

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