

Sunday, June 26, 2016

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading: 1 Kings 19:16, 19-21

2nd Reading: Galatians 5:1, 13-18

Responsorial: Psalm 16:1-2, 5, 7-11

Gospel: Luke 9:51-62

Winning the Battle for Our Minds

For freedom Christ set us free. (Galatians 5:1)

Did you know that a battle is going on in your mind right now? That's what today's second reading tells us. When Paul speaks of the "freedom" that Jesus won for us, he is telling us that we can win this battle and be free from the attacks of sin and temptation (Galatians 5:1).

What is the battle for the mind? Simply stated, we all have an incredible number of virtues and gifts. We strive to be kind, generous, selfless, loving, patient, imaginative, intuitive, and so on. At the same time, we can also be selfish, prideful, angry, moody, greedy, deceptive, lustful, lazy, jealous, and so on. We all have sinful habits that need to be "put away" and virtuous impulses that we need to "put on" more and more (Ephesians 4:22, 24).

Every one of our decisions is influenced, in some way or other, by a combination of good and bad voices: the Holy Spirit, the devil, our family and friends, our memories, and our imaginations. These voices all offer us different ways to approach how we live and the choices we make. The question we face in every situation is "Who will I listen to? How will I decide?"

If you don't want to be controlled by the negative influences, you're going to need to do two things: let the Holy Spirit speak to you, and try your best to "take every thought captive" so that you can emphasize the upright thoughts and reject the negative ones (2 Corinthians 10:5). This means holding fast to everything you experience in prayer, the Eucharist, and Scripture.

Guard your mind as if you are carrying a valuable diamond in your pocket. Don't let any evil influence rob you of your joy and peace. Try to stay close to Jesus, and you'll find yourself winning this battle for your mind and becoming more like Jesus. You'll know the freedom that Christ came to give you.

"Jesus, help me win the battle for my mind. Give me the strength to say no to sin and yes to you."

(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, notice how Elisha followed God's inspiration and call, which came through the prophet Elijah -- in spite of what the costs might be. We are often afraid of following God because we think he will ask too much of us. We may even use it as an excuse not to try. What are the "small things" God has been asking of you that you have been struggling to carry out? What steps can you take to be more responsive to God's call on your life?
2. The responsorial psalm reminds us that God our Father is not a demanding taskmaster. He is full of love and kindness toward you. He "councils" us and he will not "abandon" us. He promises us "fullness of joys" and "delights" at his "right hand forever." How do you view God the Father? Do you view him as a loving, kind, and merciful Father or as a demanding taskmaster? Why should having the correct image of our heavenly Father be a source of "joy" and "delight" to you and to others?
3. The second reading begins by telling us that "For freedom Christ set us free" and that we "were called for freedom." What do these words mean to you?
4. The second reading goes on to tell us to "serve one another through love." What practical steps can you take to respond to God's call by serving your brothers and sisters in Christ in your parish, in your small groups, and in your community?
5. Finally, St. Paul tells us in the second reading to "live by the Spirit and you will certainly not gratify the desire of the flesh." Why is this so?
6. The Gospel reiterates a point from the first reading, i.e., there is a cost to saying yes to God's call and in following and obeying his will -- rather than our own. In practice, however, we often act as if God needs to accommodate himself to what we have already decided. What are some things you can do allow God, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to become more involved in your decision-making and action? For example, how often do you pray and ask God to reveal his will prior to making an important decision, rather than just quickly deciding on your own?
7. The meditation reminds us that we are in a spiritual battle every day: "Every one of our decisions is influenced, in some way or other, by a combination of good and bad voices: the Holy Spirit, the devil, our family and friends, our memories, and our imaginations. These voices all offer us different ways to approach how we live and the choices we make. The question we face in every situation is 'Who will I listen to? How will I decide?'" How would you describe this spiritual battle in your own life?
8. The meditation goes on to give some steps we can take to win this battle: "If you don't want to be controlled by the negative influences, you're going to need to do two things: let the Holy Spirit speak to you, and try your best to 'take every thought captive' so that you can emphasize the upright thoughts and reject the negative ones (2 Corinthians 10:5). This means holding fast to everything you experience in prayer, the Eucharist, and Scripture. Guard your mind as if you are carrying a valuable diamond in your pocket. Don't let any evil influence rob you of your joy and peace. Try to stay close to Jesus, and you'll find yourself winning this battle for your mind and becoming more like Jesus. You'll know the freedom that Christ came to give you." What are some obstacles in your life that get in the way of "winning this battle for your mind and becoming more like Jesus"? Which of the steps listed above can you implement in a deeper way in your life to overcome these obstacles?
9. Take some time now to pray and ask the Lord for the grace and strength to win the battle for your mind. Use the prayer at the end of the meditation as a 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.nfcmsa.org/>). He can be contacted at mblumberg@wau.org or mblumberg@aol.com.]

As posted on the Catholic Charismatic Renewal National Service Committee's website: www.nsc-chariscenter.org