

Sunday, October 2, 2016

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading: Habakkuk 1:2-3; 2:2-4

Responsorial: Psalm 95:1-2, 6-9

2nd Reading: 2 Timothy 1:6-8, 13-14

Gospel: Luke 17:5-10

Living as “Unprofitable Servants” of the Lord

We are unprofitable servants; we have done what we were obliged to do. (Luke 17:10)

Didn't Jesus call us his friends? Aren't we called sons and daughters of God? Then why does he tell us to call ourselves “unprofitable servants”? Sometimes, Jesus can seem so confusing!

Actually, Jesus is not saying that we are worthless. We are all God's children, and we are all his friends. Neither is he saying that our works are worthless or unprofitable. Surely all the apostles who built the Church made valuable and worthwhile contributions. Surely saints like Francis of Assisi and Mother Teresa made a huge difference.

Here's the point. Our works for the Lord or the Church can deepen our faith. They are good for us and for the people we serve. They actually help build the Church. But they cannot earn us salvation. They do not give us the right to demand anything from God.

Jesus wants us to be as humble as he was. He never flaunted himself or insisted on special treatment because he is God. No, he emptied himself and took on the form of a slave. He obeyed his Father in every way. And because of that, Jesus was exalted (Philippians 2:6-10).

Jesus wants us to keep in proper perspective all the words of recognition, praise, and congratulations that people give us. He doesn't want who we are or what we do to go to our heads. This is why he rebuked James and John when they asked for seats of honor in his kingdom (Mark 10:35-40). It's why he rebuked Peter for suggesting that Jesus was too important to be crucified (Matthew 16:21-23).

In the end, we are all “unprofitable servants” (Luke 17:10). Every breath we take comes from the Lord. Every good deed we do is a sign of his grace at work in our lives. But being “unprofitable” isn't necessarily a bad thing. It's just a humble recognition that we are God's children, redeemed, called, and equipped to build his kingdom.

“Lord, teach me to serve gratefully, humbly, and faithfully”

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Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. The first reading begins with this heartfelt cry of the psalmist: “How long, O LORD? I cry for help but you do not listen!” It then goes on to describe all the reasons why he feels the way he does. We too know how easy it is to have faith in God when things are going good, and how easy it is to struggle with our faith when they are not.
 - How is your faith during the difficult times in your life?
 - Were there times when your faith in the Lord allowed you to overcome a difficult circumstance?
 - How would you describe those times?
2. The first reading ends with the Lord’s response to the cries of the psalmist: “Write down the vision clearly upon the tablets, so that one can read it readily. For the vision still has its time, presses on to fulfillment, and will not disappoint; if it delays, wait for it, it will surely come, it will not be late. The rash one has no integrity; but the just one, because of his faith, shall live.”
 - How would you describe the message the Lord’s response is trying to convey to the psalmist?
 - How do the Lord’s words apply to you?
3. The responsorial psalm, like the first reading, offers contrasting ways to respond to the work of the Lord in our lives. One is to sing joyfully to the Lord, acclaim him, offer him thanksgiving, and bow down in worship. The other is to harden our hearts and test and tempt the Lord.
 - What steps can you take individually, or with other Christians, to allow your own response to the Lord to be more like the former and less like the latter?
4. The second reading begins with these words: “Beloved: I remind you, to stir into flame the gift of God that you have through the imposition of my hands.”
 - What do these words mean to you?
 - What are some ways you can “stir into flame” the gifts of God in you and in others?
5. In the Gospel, the apostles ask Jesus to “Increase our faith.” The Lord then goes on to describe the role the apostles are to play in increasing their faith. We know that faith is a gift of God, yet we also know that each of us also has a part to play in responding to this gift.
 - How would you describe the part each of us plays?
 - What are some specific steps you can take to allow the Lord to “Increase your faith”?
6. The meditation tries to unpack the meaning of Jesus’ words to his apostles at the end of the Gospel reading: “When you have done all you have been commanded, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants; we have done what we were obliged to do.’” The meditation then ends with these words: “In the end, we are all ‘unprofitable servants’ (Luke 17:10). Every breath we take comes from the Lord. Every good deed we do is a sign of his grace at work in our lives. But being “unprofitable” isn’t necessarily a bad thing. It’s just a humble recognition that we are God’s children, redeemed, called, and equipped to build his kingdom.”
 - How would you describe the meaning of the term “unprofitable servants”?
 - Do the words at the end of the meditation describe how you see yourself as an unprofitable servant? Why or why not?
7. Take some time now to pray and ask the Lord for the grace to be an unprofitable servant. Use the prayer at the end of the meditation as a starting point.

“Lord, teach me to serve gratefully, humbly, and faithfully.”

[The discussion questions were created by Maurice Blumberg, who is in 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

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