

Sunday, October 30, 2016

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading: Wisdom 11:22–12:2

2nd Reading: 2 Thessalonians 1:11–2:2

Responsorial: Psalm 145:1-2, 8-11, 13-14

Gospel: Luke 19:1-10

Opening Ourselves to God’s Transforming Love and Mercy

The Lord is gracious and merciful. (Psalm 145:8)

From the general audience of Pope Francis, January 13, 2016:

“In Sacred Scripture, the Lord is presented as a ‘merciful God.’ This is his name, through which he unveils, so to speak, his face and his heart to us. As the Book of Exodus recounts, on revealing himself to Moses he defined himself in this way: ‘*the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness*’ (Exodus 34:6). . . .

“The Lord is ‘merciful’: this word evokes a tender approach like that of a mother toward her child. . . . The image it suggests is that of a God who is moved and who softens for us like a mother when she takes her child in her arms, wanting only to love, protect, help, ready to give everything, even herself. . . .

“It is also said of this merciful God that he is ‘*slow to anger*.’ . . . God knows how to wait, his time is not the impatient one of man; he is like the wise farmer who knows how to wait, allowing time for the good seed to grow, in spite of the weeds (Matthew 13:24-30).

“Lastly, the Lord proclaims himself ‘*abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness*.’ How beautiful this definition of God is! . . . The word ‘love,’ used here, indicates *affection, grace, goodness*. It is not soap opera love. It is love which takes the first step, which does not depend on human merit but on immense gratuitousness. It is divine solicitude that . . . is able to go beyond sin, to overcome evil and forgive it.

“Abounding in ‘*faithfulness*’: this is the final word of God’s revelation to Moses. . . . Faithfulness in mercy is the very being of God. For this reason God is totally and always trustworthy. . . . This is the assurance of our faith. Thus, in this Jubilee of Mercy, let us entrust ourselves to him totally, and experience the joy of being loved by this ‘God who is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in love and faithfulness.’”

“Father God, thank you for being so loving and merciful toward me.”

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Questions for Reflection or Discussion:

1. In the first reading from the Book of Wisdom, we learn of God's love for all things, his mercy for all people, and his forgiveness for repentant sinners.
 - It is often said that the Old Testament image of God is so different from the New Testament image of God. In what way is the first reading's description of the attributes of God similar to the New Testament view of God?
2. The responsorial psalm begins with these words: "I will extol you, O my God and King, and I will bless your name forever and ever. Every day will I bless you, and I will praise your name forever and ever."
 - Why is it important to bless and praise the Lord "Every day"?
 - Do you believe this is something you will be doing "forever and ever"? Why or why not?
3. The responsorial psalm also speaks of God's graciousness, mercy, kindness, and compassion. It ends with these words: "The LORD is faithful in all his words and holy in all his works. The LORD lifts up all who are falling and raises up all who are bowed down."
 - How important is it for us to follow the Lord's example and reach out to others beyond our small circle of family or friends? What more can you do?
4. St. Paul begins the second reading with these words: "Brothers and sisters: We always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and powerfully bring to fulfillment every good purpose and every effort of faith, that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, in accord with the grace of our God and Lord Jesus Christ."
 - How important is it to you to spend time every day interceding in prayer for the needs of others?
 - Is there room for improvement? How?
5. St. Paul, in the second reading, also warns the early Christians to be on their guard against false "prophets" who seem to know when the Lord will return.
 - How would a deeper understanding of the nature of God, and faith in his power to transform even the hardest of hearts, help your view of the future to be more hopeful and Christ-centered?
6. In the Gospel, we again see the transforming power of Jesus' love and mercy when he reaches out to someone who was hated and disrespected by his contemporaries. Jesus said he came "to seek and save what was lost." Notice that Jesus did not wait around but actively sought those in need. He also told Zacchaeus that, "Today salvation has come to this house" (Luke 19:9).
 - Zacchaeus "received him with joy" and the crowd "began to grumble." Why did this happen?
 - In what ways can you be less passive and more active in sharing the good news of Jesus with others.
7. The meditation is from the general audience of Pope Francis, January 13, 2016. It is the Holy Father's reflection on the words from Exodus 34:6. It ends with these words: "Thus, in this Jubilee of Mercy, let us entrust ourselves to him totally, and experience the joy of being loved by this 'God who is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in love and faithfulness (Exodus 34:6)'"
 - Despite our shortcomings, and even our double standards, Jesus continues to reach out to us just as he reached out to Zacchaeus. What steps can you take to open yourself more to the transforming love and mercy of our Lord?
8. Take some time now to pray and thank our heavenly Father for his love and mercy. Use the prayer below from the end of the meditation as a starting point.

"Father God, thank you for being so loving and merciful toward me."

[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

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

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